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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the need for family, school, and community members to participate in partnerships to support middle level children, this study investigated the perceptions of family members, community members, and middle school teachers regarding their relationships with each other from a perspective that views all three groups as integral parts of a complex ecological system with equal standing. Six focus group interviews were conducted with groups of 3 to 8 persons, with group interviews conducted separately for parents of middle school students, middle school teachers, and community members who were involved with middle school students. A total of 15 family members, 12 teachers, and 6 community members participated in the study. The findings provided insights as to how participants' views of their roles and responsibility with children influenced how they see their role in working with other adults. Three areas were identified that influence the participants' perceptions of their roles in working together: (1) development of the relationship itself; (2) lack of communication; and (3) value conflicts. Findings support recommendations for civic leaders, community members working directly with middle school children, educational leaders, family members, teacher educators, and educational administration educators. (Eight appendices include data collection instruments, a matrix of findings, and suggestions for starting a family involvement program. Contains approximately 115 references.) (KB)

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PARTNERSHIPS AT THE MIDDLE LEVEL: PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY MEMBERS, COMMUNITY MEMBERS, AND TEACHERS

by

PATRICIA MAUREEN MUSSER

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
in
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP:
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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

The abstract and dissertation of Patricia Maureen Musser for the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership: Administration were presented April 29, 1998, and accepted by the dissertation committee and the doctoral program.

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An abstract of the dissertation of Patricia Maureen Musser for the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership: Administration presented April 29, 1998.

Title: Partnerships at the Middle Level: Perceptions of Family Members, Community Members, and Teachers

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of family members, community members, and middle level teachers regarding their relationships with each other from a perspective that views all three groups as integral parts of a complex ecological system with equal standing. The purpose for developing relationships is to support children's academic achievement and healthy development, not just in school, but also in life. Both the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) report and the National Middle School Association (1995) recognize the need for family, school, and community members to participate in partnerships to support middle level children.

The research questions that guided the study are: (a) What are the perceptions of family members, community members, and teachers regarding their current roles in working with each other to benefit middle level students?

and (b) What are the perceptions of family members, community members, and teachers regarding what their roles should be in working with each other to benefit middle level students?

The ecological model of human development formulated by Bronfenbrenner (1979), provided the overarching theoretical framework for the study. The symbolic interactionist orientation guided the study design. Separate focus groups with family members, community members who work with middle level children, and middle level teachers were used to generate data to answer the research questions.

The findings provide insights as to how family members, community members, and teachers view their roles in working with each other. In particular, how the participants view their roles and responsibilities with children shape how they see their roles in working with other adults.

Three areas were identified that influence the participants' perceptions of their roles in working together: The degree of the development of the relationship itself and two problematic areas which need to be negotiated to improve the relationship--lack of communication and value conflicts. Recommendations which flow from the findings are addressed to civic leaders, community members who work directly with middle level children, educational leaders (including principals and district leaders), family members, teacher educators, and educational administration educators. Areas are suggested for additional research.

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The importance of family, school, and community relationships in the educational process has captured the attention of parent advocate groups, school reformers, and has even surfaced in recent national discussions by Presidential candidates. Emphasis is being placed on the formation of family, school, and community partnerships to increase involvement in the total environment that contributes to the child's socialization and education. From this viewpoint partnerships between families, schools, and communities will improve student achievement at school and address social problems that are perceived to be the result of changes in family structures, the dissolution of the community, and the changing demographics of the United States.

Policy initiatives developed at the national level provide further evidence of the attention given to family, school, and community partnerships. For example, the U.S. Department of Education (1994) has established parental involvement as a national educational goal, declaring "by the year 2000 every school will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (p. 133). To help meet this goal the U.S. Department of Education established the Family Involvement Partnership for Learning that includes more than 100 organizations nationwide. The U.S. Department of Education has also sponsored numerous research initiatives, commissioned papers, and reviews of literature.

Henderson and Berla's (1994) examination of the literature includes 15 studies finding that the more families are involved with their children's education, the more successful their children are in school. Educational programs that involve families in their design and develop a "partnership" relationship are especially effective in raising student achievement.

Family, school, and community involvement is a particular concern in middle level education. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development in 1989 stated in their report, Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century that the report:

> reinforces an emerging movement, still relatively unrecognized by policy makers, to build support for and educate young adolescents through new relationships between schools, families, and health and community institutions. (p. 13)

Since the publication of the Carnegie Council's Turning Points report in 1989, policy makers have started to recognize the need for family, school and community involvement at the middle level. Types of involvement identified by Epstein (1995, 1996), are: (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaborating with the community. The National Middle School Association (1995) recognized this need and stated, "Families and community members are important stakeholders in developmentally responsive middle level schools" (p. 17).

Despite these calls for families to participate in partnerships supporting middle level children, family involvement decreases when children reach the middle level (Epstein, 1996). Little is known regarding how those directly involved with middle level students (family members, community members who work with middle level children, and teachers) view their roles, responsibilities, and relationships with each other.

Purpose and Problem Statement

There is growing interest in community, family, and school partnerships at the middle level. The U.S. Department of Education sponsored a conference in Alexandria, Virginia in 1992 on parent and community involvement in the middle grades (Rutherford, Billig, & Kettering, 1993). The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989, 1992, 1995) has produced three reports calling for increased family and community involvement at the middle level. The National Middle School Association (1995) identified family and community partnerships as characteristic of a developmentally responsive middle level school. Epstein (1996), Epstein and Connors (1993), and Epstein and Dauber (1989) also called for increasing community, family, and school partnerships at the middle level.

The extensive amount of information regarding family, school and community involvement at all educational levels (K-12) is an indication of how this issue is complicated and multifaceted. Differing perceptions of the roles of family members, middle level teachers, and community members challenge the formation of partnerships (Cibulka & Kritek, 1996; Parkay & Stanford, 1992; Pratt, 1994). Perceptions and attitudes may differ dramatically between and among the family members, teachers, and community. This condition is exacerbated when teachers and family members come from different cultures, races, or class backgrounds (Chavkin, 1993b; Epstein & Dauber, 1989).

Despite the extensive literature on family, community, and school involvement in general, the research regarding the perceptions of family members, community members, and middle level teachers regarding working together to benefit middle level children is limited. This is especially true regarding the perceptions of community members who work with middle level children. However, there is substantial research that connects family involvement promoting home learning activities with student achievement (Rutherford, Billig, & Kettering, 1993). Knowing perspectives of the family members, teachers, and community members along with obstacles they face in participating in partnerships will help teacher educators, administrators, policy makers, and community members to develop programs and policies to increase participation of all three groups at the middle level.

Designing and implementing family, school, and community partnership programs to benefit middle level students is complicated. The context, or environment, in which family, school, and community involvement programs are developed must be taken into account. Factors that influence middle-level family, teacher, and community partnerships include the middle school institutional setting; early adolescent development; and the expectations, attitudes, and beliefs of the parents, teachers, and community members (Rutherford, Billig, & Kettering, 1993).

Need for the Study

In the formation of partnerships between families, schools and communities, the perceptions of families, teachers, and community members who have frequent contact with middle level students are often overlooked. The research inquiry focuses on how family members, community members, and teachers view their current role and what they perceive their role should be in working with each other to benefit middle level students. Understanding the perceptions of all three groups will help facilitate the establishment of partnerships at the middle level to benefit middle level students' healthy development and academic achievement.

Definition of Terms

Terms used in this study are operationally defined as follows.

Community: The term "community" is used to describe the external community of the school. It is comprised of families, community-based institutions such as churches and clubs, business interests, social service agencies, and society in general. This operational definition contains elements of the continuum between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft and also Steinberg's social network

(Furman & Merz, 1996; Steinberg, 1989).[1] This is to

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[1] The concept of "community" in the education literature is often ill-defined and ambiguous. It is sometimes associated with the physical boundaries of a neighborhood. It is also used to describe the school community, referring to the interaction and socialization that takes place within a school site. Creating a sense of community within a school is used to describe relationships based on norms and shared values that contribute to a caring environment (Ryan & Freidlaender, 1996). The term community is also used to denote the "larger community" which is comprised of business interests, social service agencies, and society in general (Berns, 1989; Furman & Merz, 1996; Steinberg, 1989).

Furman and Merz (1996) discussed the concept of community in terms of classical sociological theory, including the system developed by Ferdinand Tonnies, a German sociologist. Tonnies developed a classification of social relationships based on the concept of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Gemeinschaft relationships are primary relationships that involve a closeness, kinship, neighborliness, intimacy, and "natural will." Natural will implies that the person responds to a relationship because it is a "natural" form of social interaction, grounded in a person's norms. Gesellschaft relationships are more formal, distant, and temporary. They are associated with "rational will" and a person responds because of a contractual obligation to do so.

The Gemeinschaft construct of human interaction is closely aligned with the traditional, perhaps romanticized (Coontz, 1992), vision of the American community as a place where people have a sense of belonging and where the community provides them with a sense of identity (Broom & Selznick, 1963).

Steinberg (1989) discussed community in terms of it being psychologically meaningful for those involved. In this sense the community is not defined by physical boundaries but rather as a social network comprised of formal and informal relationships that share purpose, identity and values. Steinberg pointed out that from this perspective, it is not clear if norms regarding family involvement in education grow out of the family's social network or from the school as a social institution. The school by its philosophy of family involvement may create norms for family involvement that families comply with as individual families, not as communities of families.

The above uses of the word community identify a community as having distinctive characteristics which may differentiate the external community from what some educators call the "school community" which refers to the interaction and socialization that takes place within a school site.

Family: "Family" includes parents, grandparents, other extended family members, or other significant adults who have an active role in raising a child. As a result of changes in demographics and the structure of the family, the term "parents" does not necessarily adequately describe those who have an active role in influencing or raising a child. Thus, the more inclusive term "family" is used.

Involvement: The term "involvement" refers to specific actions taken by families, teachers, and community members to benefit children and the community as a whole. A family member is involved at school by volunteering to read to children; a family member is involved with children at home by providing support and encouragement; a teacher is involved in the community by taking part in a "community clean up day;" and a community

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or may not be shared by other communities. Television and advances in communication technology have blurred the boundaries of communities, yet communities of all kinds are part of a larger social system and the social system is part of the community. Gist and Fava (1964) pointed out that social, economic, and political organizations cross the boundaries of communities and make them interdependent.

member is involved with middle level students by leading a 4-H club.

Middle Level Students: "Middle level students" are early adolescents ranging from the ages of approximately 10-15 (National Middle School Association, 1995). Early adolescence is a time of rapid physical and social changes, with each middle level student developing at his or her own pace. There is great variety among early adolescents of the same gender and age regarding social, intellectual, behavioral, and physical development. Some children enter early adolescence before age 10 and do not pass into middle adolescence until after age 15. For the purposes of this paper the ages from 10-15 are used to identify middle level students, realizing that it is a developmental level and the ages are approximate.

Middle School Philosophy: The "middle school philosophy" is based on the premise that early adolescents, children between the ages of 10 and 15, have unique needs and require a developmentally responsive organizational structure, a variety of instructional methods, and opportunities to participate in exploratory curriculum offerings to meet those needs (George & Alexander, 1993; National Middle School Association, 1995). The terms "middle school movement" and "middle level (or school) reform" are often used synonymously.

Middle Schools: "Middle schools" are schools organized to educate and serve middle level students. McEwin, Dickinson, and Jenkins (1996) found that typical grade organizations in middle schools in the United States are 5-8, 6-8, 7-8, and 7-9. Eighty percent of seventh graders attend schools with these grade configurations. Only 9% of seventh grade students in the United States attend K-8 schools. The most common grade configuration for middle schools in the United States is 6-8 (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1996). For the purposes of this paper, middle schools are discussed in terms of the 6-8 grade configuration.

Norms: "Norms" are expectations and rules of behavior that reflect the traditions, cultural values, and assumptions of individuals and groups (Henslin, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1991).

Partnerships: The use of the word "partnerships" to describe family, school, and community interactions and relationships is based on the connotation of "partnerships" developed by Swap (1993) and Epstein and Connors (1993). Partnership involves a relationship, developed over time, with equal standing among the partners. The partners work toward shared goals, contributing strengths and assets, sharing information, and supporting each other in assisting children in the middle level to succeed in school and lead a productive life. It is a more inclusive concept than that associated with the terms "parent involvement," "home-school relationships," or "community-school relationships." As used in this paper, it also implies a relationship that goes beyond the family's traditional role of supporting the school, but requires that the schools and community agencies also support parents and treat them as equal partners in addressing the needs of middle level students.

Relationships: For the purpose of this study the term "relationship" describes the interactions between two or more people or groups who have an association that continues over a period of time. "When an association continues long enough for two people to become linked together by a relatively stable set of expectations, it is called a relations" (Vander Zanden, 1996, p. 101).

Role: In general, a "role" is a typified response to a typified expectation (Berger, 1963). The perception of the expectation of appropriate behavior provides a pattern that guides the individual's behavior in a particular situation. For the purpose of this paper, a "role" is a pattern of behavior based on a person's social status or work position in a given situation. The social status and/or work positions examined in this paper include roles as family member, teacher, and community member. How an individual interprets a role determines the actions the person will take in the role.

Service Learning: Service learning is a form of applied learning utilizing instructional strategies that link the curriculum taught in the classroom with applications in a real life setting that emphasize the participatory responsibilities of citizens in the community. Service learning can be a part of an integrated curriculum or can be used to provide instruction and authentic assessment in a specific content area. Quality service learning projects include careful planning with clearly stated goals, objectives, student responsibilities, and expectations. Other key components to quality service learning projects include: (a) students involved in meaningful community-based service learning experiences, (b) thoughtfully planned reflection by the students as an integral part of the program, and (c) frequent and ongoing assessment and self-study as major components of the experience (Andrus, 1996).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In seeking to examine perceptions of family members, community members, and teachers regarding their role in partnerships to benefit middle level students, this study begins with a review of the literature in *six* major areas. These are: (a) theoretical models of family, school, and community relationships; (b) types of family, school, and community involvement; (c) specific types of family, school, and community involvement that influences middle level student achievement; (d) factors that shape family, school and community involvement at the middle level; and (e) effective middle level schools. This chapter concludes with a synthesis of the literature and the research questions that result from this review.

The literature regarding partnerships at the middle level is limited. However, there is an extensive literature base regarding partnerships across K-12 grade levels. Thus, this literature review includes information regarding family, school and community partnerships across all grade levels, but focuses on literature specific to the middle level when it is available.

The focus of this study is the perceptions of those who have frequent, direct contact with middle level students: family members, teachers, and community members. This is not to discount the importance of the role played by middle level students in partnerships, nor does it ignore the importance of the role of administrators and policy makers at all levels in implementing and sustaining of partnerships.

The role played by middle level students in promoting or discouraging communication between school and home is critical in the development of relationships between families, schools, and community members. Often the student is the messenger between school and home. For example, if the student does not bring home announcements of school and community activities, families often are not aware of what is available. Steinberger (1992) reported that the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 indicated that 62% of eighth grade students rarely discuss what is happening at school with their families. She further pointed out that when families and teachers do form alliances, students often react by "withdrawing or rebelling in an attempt to exert control over the alliance" (p. 188).

As well, administrators and policy makers are key players in the implementation of partnerships. Rutherford, Billig, and Kettering (1993) identified three elements that are critical factors to the implementation of partnerships at all levels of organization. These are: (a) communication; (b) the involvement of key players; and (c) the allocation of resources sufficient to provide training, implementation, and coordination of programs. Williams and Chavkin (1990) identified two additional essential elements: written policies and administrative support. Chavkin (1993b) reported that school districts have more parent involvement when formal written policies regarding parent involvement are in place. She also reported that districts play a key role in providing the resources for training and coordination of programs.

School leaders directly influence the values and conceptions of family, school, and community interactions (Ryan & Freidlaender, 1996). Principals are instrumental in creating school policy and supporting a school culture that encourages family, school, and community involvement. Principals also can reward teachers for promoting family, school, and community involvement programs, provide educational opportunities for teachers to learn about involvement programs, and provide resources that support involvement programs. Swap (1993) reported that there is more parent involvement when principals have established policies that encourage involvement.

This study is about the perceptions of family members, teachers, and community members who are in frequent, direct contact with middle level students. While important and interesting, the roles that students, administrators, and policy makers fill in the formation of family, school, and community partnerships is beyond the scope of this study.

Theoretical Models of Family, School, and Community Relationships

The traditions, cultural values, and assumptions of the family, school and community members influence the types of relationships that develop between family, school, and community members. Perceptions may differ dramatically between and among the groups. This condition is exacerbated when teachers and parents come from different cultures, races, or class backgrounds (Chavkin, 1993b; Epstein & Dauber, 1989). The assumptions of families, teachers, and community members are influenced by the theoretical model of interactions that are knowingly, or unknowingly, subscribed to by various members of the groups.

Schools as organizations are often the leaders in determining how relationships between families, schools and communities develop and are maintained. Schools and school districts have the organizational ability to communicate with parents and community members (Moles, 1993). They know the parents and key people in the community. Schools make choices and determine through their action or inaction what types of interactions with families and communities can and will occur.

Five theoretical models that describe the relationships between schools, families, and communities are described below. Swap (1993) identified four models: (a) the protective model, (b) the school-to-home transmission model, (c) the curriculum enrichment model, and (d) the partnership model. Connors and Epstein (1995) developed the fifth model: the overlapping spheres of influence.

The Protective Model

The protective model describes a view that sees the school as being responsible for educating children and uses structure and ritual to protect itself from interference from families. The family's responsibility ends at home, and teachers assume responsibility for the children's school-based education. This is similar to the separate influences perspective described by Connors and Epstein (1995) that views the family and school as having separate roles in influencing the development and education of children.

The School-to-Home Transmission Model

In the school-to-home transmission model, the school has expectations regarding the role of the family and expects families to support their children and the school within the guidelines provided by the school. This is similar to what Bickel (1995) described as families being viewed as a resource to support the agenda of the school, with the school determining how and when that support is to occur. In this model, family involvement is requested only when the school needs something.

The Curriculum Enrichment Model

The curriculum enrichment model invites families to contribute their knowledge and experiences to curriculum development and delivery. This model is frequently used to expand multicultural curricula. It provides a way for both teachers and families to learn about the cultures at home and at school. The relationship is limited to the curriculum and does not extend to school management or policy development.

The Partnership Model

Swap (1993) described the partnership model as encompassing a new vision for relationships between schools, families, and communities. The use of the word "partnerships" to describe family, school and community interactions and relationships is also used by Epstein and Connors (1993). Partnerships involve formal relationships, developed over time, and characterized by an equal standing among the partners. The partners work toward shared goals, contributing strengths and assets, sharing information, and supporting each other in assisting students to succeed in school. Epstein and Connors (1993) defined "partnerships" as a more inclusive concept than that associated with the terms "parent involvement," "home-school relationships," or "community-school relationships."

The partnership model differs from the school-to-home transmission model by emphasizing the importance of educators, families, and community members working together as equals to accomplish a common mission (i.e., the success of all children in the school). The partnership model differs from the curriculum enrichment model because it emphasizes a common mission that addresses the entire curriculum and includes family and community members' voices in the planning and decision making processes.

The Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model

The overlapping spheres of influence model described by Connors and Epstein (1995), Epstein (1995), and Epstein and Connors (1993) combine the traits of the models described by Swap (1993) and a child-centered ecological model based on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979). In this theoretical model, the family, school, community, and peer group are seen as influencing a child's development in different ways at different times.

Two components of this model are external influences and internal influences. External influences are described as time and behavior. Time takes into consideration the age of the child. Behavior takes into consideration the influence of the environment in terms of the philosophies and characteristics of those involved. This model recognizes that there are some times when the spheres of influence (family, school, community, and peers) operate separately and other times when they overlap and interact with each other. Epstein and Connors (1993) identified the times when the spheres overlap as being of potential significance in influencing students.

The overlapping spheres of influence model includes two areas that are not specifically addressed in the other theoretical models discussed above. These are the age of the child and the influence of peers in a child's development. In the implementation of family, school, and community partnerships, children are key players. As children mature, they play an important role in communication between families and schools. This is especially true as they reach middle school and high school, where family-school partnerships are not as well developed as they are in elementary school. Epstein and Connors (1993) described school and family partnerships as being developmental and taking into consideration the changing characteristics of children, families, and schools as the children grow older.

Summary

The theoretical models discussed above are useful in providing a structure for the study of school, family and community relationships. The models lay a groundwork to help understand philosophical orientations that reflect and contribute to the development of the norms and traditions that influence school, family, and community relationships. The theoretical models also provide a structure that recognizes the many complex and interrelated factors which contribute to human actions.

Formal and informal policies and the culture and the norms of a school act to influence teacher actions. The norms of a school can be stronger than a teacher's beliefs regarding the importance of teacher and family interactions (Swap, 1993). Just as culture, norms, and traditions influence teachers' actions, the culture, norms, and traditions of families influence their inclination to participate in supporting their children's education and community activities.

Typologies of Family, School, and Community Involvement

Numerous researchers, organizations, and reports have identified ways that families and communities are involved in schools (Bickel, 1995; Connors & Epstein, 1995; Davies, 1991; Epstein & Connors, 1993; Flaxman & Inger, 1992; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hidalso, Siu, Bright, Swap, & Epstein, 1995; Hopfenberg et al., 1993; Moore, 1991; National PTA, 1993; Riley, 1994; Rutherford, Billig, & Kettering, 1993). Perhaps the best known categorization of these ways is Epstein's (1995, 1996) six types of involvement that form a framework for the establishment of family, school, and community partnerships. Swap (1993) also developed a framework based on Epstein's earlier typology that is designed specifically to address types of interactions based on the partnership model described above. In this section, the types of involvement and interactions between families, schools, and communities as articulated by Epstein (1996) and Swap (1993) are presented.

Epstein's Typology of Family, School, and Community Involvement

Epstein's (1996) typology provides a comprehensive framework for six types of involvement which specifically address partnerships at the middle level. Epstein's types of involvement are: (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaborating with the community. Epstein (1995, 1996) pointed out that an important factor in developing "true" partnerships between families, schools, and communities is rethinking traditional roles and relationships. She identified challenges that call for a redefinition of concepts and terms to allow partnerships to develop at the middle level.

Parenting. Parenting involves the schools and community working together with families to establish a supportive home environment, making sure all families have access to information, and ensuring that families have opportunities to share information with schools about their children. Epstein (1996) identified as a challenge for schools the necessity of developing a wider view of communication that includes making information available in a variety of forms so all parents can access it in a variety of ways and at a variety of times.

At the middle level, parenting includes understanding early adolescent development and providing a home environment that supports learning. Middle level schools can support parents by providing workshops for parents to learn about the needs of early adolescents and by providing opportunities for parents to exchange ideas and form supportive social networks.

Communicating. Communicating with families regarding school programs and student progress can take many forms. Report cards, newsletters, phone conversations, and open houses are some of the traditional ways schools communicate. At the middle level, conferences for parents with teams of teachers and student-led conferences are also appropriate. Communicating can also involve the establishment of a welcome wagon for families new to the school and school newsletters that include student work, parent columns, and parent response forms.

Some challenges in this area include making sure communications from the school to home are clear and understandable for all parents. Factors such as parents who do not speak English, have poor sight and need large print, or "who do not read well" need to be addressed

(Epstein, 1995). Epstein also stated that there is a challenge to "establish clear two-way communications from home to school and from school to home" (p. 705). She redefines and expands what is meant by communication "to mean two-way, three-way, and many-way channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community" (p. 705).

Volunteering. Volunteering involves the school recruiting volunteers and making sure that families know they are needed and valued. It also involves scheduling and training to enable volunteers to participate productively. Epstein (1995) suggested a redefinition of "volunteer" to include activities that support "school goals and children's learning development in any way, at any place, and at any time--not just during the school day and at the school building" (p. 705). Volunteering can also involve middle level students. Students should understand how volunteers help the school and how they can volunteer themselves to be involved in their school and community.

Learning at home. Learning at home involves the school and the teachers coordinating and designing interactive homework that is aligned with the student's class work. Middle schools can provide families with information regarding the curriculum and the skills needed to pass each course. Middle level students can be responsible for discussing important knowledge and skills they are learning. Epstein (1995) redefined homework to include activities that are shared at home and tied to authentic learning experiences.

Decision making. Decision making challenges include assuring that families from all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups are invited to be parent leaders and that training is provided to enable parents to be parent leaders. Epstein (1995) also suggested that students along with parents be represented in decision making groups. Decision making is redefined to mean real, shared decision making in partnerships that are not power struggles but work toward shared goals.

Collaborating with community. Collaborating with community challenges schools to build partnerships that match school goals and develop opportunities for all families to be involved in community programs. Middle level schools should inform students and families about community programs and the services available to middle level students and their families. Middle level schools should also design processes that enable families and middle level students to have equitable access to community resources and programs.

Collaborating with the community includes recognizing the learning activities that take place in the community. Club and volunteer work should be valued as learning experiences. Epstein (1996) suggests that schools need to "recognize and link students' valuable learning experiences in the community to the school curricula (such as lessons for nonschool skills and talents, club and volunteer work)" (p. 46). Epstein (1995) redefined community to include "not only the neighborhoods where students' homes and schools are located by also any neighborhoods that influence their learning and development" (p. 705).

Swap's Typology of Family, School, and Community Involvement

Swap (1993) developed a framework designed specifically to address types of interactions included in the partnership model. Based on an early version of Epstein's typology, Swap focused on the most important elements of partnerships between the home and school and reduced Epstein's categories to four. In Swap's framework, the categories are: (a) creating two-way communication, (b) enhancing learning at home and at school, (c) providing mutual support, and (d) making joint decisions.

Creating two-way communication. Two-way communication implies that teachers and families listen to each other. They establish joint expectations for children and work together to meet expectations. Informal social functions are held to allow the development of relationships between families and teachers. A welcoming atmosphere at the school, clear expectations of the role of the school and the role of the families, and developing ways to hear from parents are aids to developing two-way communication. Swap (1993) pointed out that developing a culture in which two-way communication is acceptable and productive takes time. Trust between teachers and families is not automatic. In fact, teacher-family relationships are often adversarial (Lightfoot, 1978; Swap, 1993). To build relationships there must be opportunities to interact over an extended period of time.

Enhancing learning at home and at school. In this category Swap (1993) combined Epstein's classification of "learning at home" and "volunteering." She called for families to create a culture at home that supports the school and learning. Schools can support learning at home by providing families information through workshops regarding how to help their children, assisting families to provide for their children's basic needs, and offering information about homework. Family involvement in learning at school demonstrates to children that their family values schooling. Swap suggested that family members can be effective as tutors in school, acting as mentors, and helping to develop the curriculum.

Swap (1993) also discussed the need for educators and families of color to work together to support their children's learning. She pointed out that families of color meet challenges in helping their children to be successfully bicultural and face racism without losing motivation or self-esteem.

Providing mutual support. Mutual support includes schools supporting families, families supporting schools, and the community supporting schools and families. Some ways that schools support families include providing activities that enhance parenting skills, seminars for parents and educators, and outreach to parents in their homes. Ways that families support schools include family members as helpers, family members as advocates within the school and in the larger community, family members as joint problem solvers and decision makers, and the acknowledgment by family members of educators' accomplishments. Community support includes providing resources for schools and families, providing out-of-school activities for children, developing school-business partnerships, and providing community services in the schools (Swap, 1993).

Making joint decisions. Family involvement as members of shared decision making teams is an example of joint decision making in a partnership. Swap (1993) pointed out that one of the benefits of family and community involvement in decision making is providing an arena for an exchange of information and expertise:

> Partnership in decision making does not assume that parents or educators have expertise in the same areas. Partnership entails recognizing each other's legitimate authority. The task is to create a context in which the important information available to parents and educators (and others outside the community) can be usefully exchanged in order to make decisions that affect children, educators, and the larger community. (p. 147)

Swap's (1993) framework suggests a change in thinking by all groups involved regarding their roles, assumptions, and relationships. Seeley (1993) also calls for a paradigm shift to make partnerships a reality. This requires viewing the education of children as a joint effort between families, schools, and communities with new roles and relationships among all involved. Epstein (1993) suggested that relationships based on power, which often lead to conflicts, need to be reformed to develop relationships based on equality and caring.

The Relationship of Family, School, and Community Involvement on Student's Healthy Development and Academic Achievement--Application of an Ecological Framework

The previous section of this literature review examined ways that families, schools, and communities interact and can be involved in partnerships. This section examines the issue of "so what?" What influence does family, school, and community involvement actually have on children's healthy development and academic achievement? In this section, the literature is reviewed to determine the influence of family, school, and community involvement on student achievement and healthy development from a child-centered perspective.

Family, school, and community influences on student achievement and healthy development in this literature review are shaped by the overarching theoretical framework of an ecological model of human development formulated by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and applied by Connors and Epstein (1995), Epstein (1995), and Epstein and Connors (1993) in the overlapping spheres of influence model. Bronfenbrenner identified four systems of interrelationships that influence human development, nested within each other like a set of Russian dolls. These are (a) the microsystem, (b) the mesosystem, (c) the exosystem, and (c) the macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner's model focuses on the child and the influences these systems have on the child. When examining how the child's involvement with spheres of influence (family, school, and community) actually influence achievement and healthy development, Bronfenbrenner's model provides a framework to consider the interactions within the systems and between the systems and their influence on the child. Figure 1 diagrams the interrelationships between the systems.

The microsystem involves the child's immediate setting at any given time including the family, school, and community settings. It involves physical space--such as a neighborhood, home, or school; the people who have direct relations with the child--such as family members, teachers, and peers; and the activities that the child engages in by herself/himself or with others.

The mesosystem involves the interactions between two or more groups that are members of the child's microsystem, for example, family members, teachers, and community members. The greater the quantity and quality of the interactions between the groups the more impact they have on the child's socialization. The mesosystem supports and influences the experiences the child has in the microsystem (Berns, 1989; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

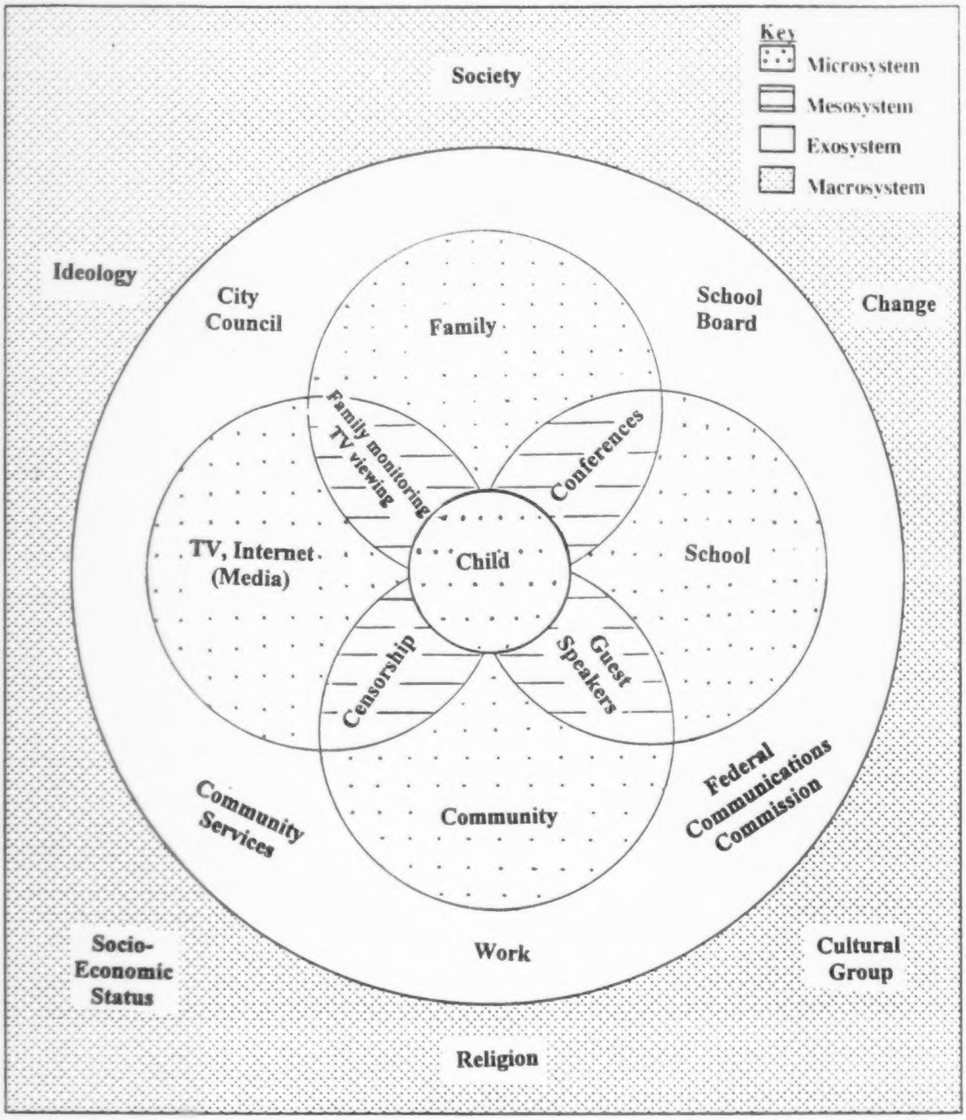
Key
Microsystem
Mesosystem
Exosystem
Macrosystem
Society
Ideology
Change
City Council
School Board
Family
Family monitoring TV viewing
Conferences
TV, Internet (Media)
Child
School
Censorship
Guest Speakers
Community
Community Services
Federal Communications Commission
Work
Socio-Economic Status
Cultural Group
Religion

Figure 1. An ecological model of human development. Based on concepts from Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Berns (1989).

The exosystem is more distant from the child's daily life than the microsystem and mesosystem. The exosystem

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includes activities that take place in settings where the child is not actively involved. Family work situations, the school board, and government agencies are examples of elements in the exosystems. Changes in the exosystem can affect the child's microsystem. Changes in family job situations, decisions to reduce a library's open hours, decisions of the school board, etc. all influence the child's microsystem (Berns, 1989; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The macrosystem is comprised of the culture and the ideology that direct the general belief system in which the child is raised. Religious institutions, social class membership, and national or international economic disruptions are part of the macrosystem and influence the exosystem, mesosystem and microsystem (Berns, 1989; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Connors & Epstein, 1995).

This research inquiry is primarily focused on examining relationships in the mesosystem. However, this section of the review of the literature examines the influences of both the microsystem and the mesosystem on the student's healthy development and achievement. The following discussion is organized by the primary location of involvement in the home, in the school, or in the community. This organization also reflects Gordon's (1994) three models of involvement: (a) the family influence at home, (b) family involvement at school in various roles from volunteer to decision maker, and (c) community interactions.

Relationship of the Home Environment to Student's Healthy Development and Achievement

The home environment (including parenting styles, family support of children, communication, and interactions) has been shown to influence student achievement. Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Robers, and Fraleigh (1987) used a questionnaire sent to 7,836 high school students to study the relationship between parenting styles and student achievement, finding a relationship as measured by student grades. Authoritarian parenting, defined as parents who teach children not to question or argue with adults and where children are punished for low grades, is associated with the lowest academic achievement. Permissive parenting is defined as parents who appear to be indifferent to grades and who are not involved with their children's education at home or at school. Permissive parenting is associated with higher academic achievement than authoritarian parenting. An authoritative parenting style, defined as parents who engage in two-way communication with children, praise for achievements, and restrictions for bad grades combined with help and encouragement is associated with higher academic achievement than either authoritarian or permissive parenting styles. Dornbusch et al. (1987) further report that parenting style has more influence on student achievement than family education levels, ethnicity, or family structure. Three factors that families control (student absenteeism, the availability of reading materials at home, and the amount of time children spend watching television) are reported to account for 90% of the difference in eighth-grade mathematics scores (Riley, 1994).

There is a substantial body of research indicating that programs designed to involve families with schools strengthen the home learning environment and can assist family members to fulfill their role as teachers of their children (Chrispeels, 1993; Clark, 1983; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Riley, 1994; Rutherford, Billig, & Kettering, 1993; Walberg, 1984; Weston, 1989). Programs involving educators and parents which modify what Walberg (1984) identified as the "alterable curriculum of the home" (including such factors as informed conversations, leisure reading, regulating television viewing and peer activities) have an effect over twice that of socioeconomic status (SES) in children's achievement. Clark (1988) found that "linguistic capital" (the family members as teachers providing instruction in language skills) and what Coleman (1989) identified as "social capital" (family interest, intimacy and involvement with children over time) influence the school achievement of children.

The research that links school performance with the home environment is based on an assumption of continuity between and among home-school cultures and ways of knowing. This may be problematic for families with different cultural practices than those reflected by the school. An example derives from the American Indian culture. Sipes (1993) mentioned several value differences between American Indians and the Anglo-American majority culture. In American Indian cultures, children are treated with the same respect as adults, and thus the discipline imposed by the school culture is considered ill-mannered by American Indians. In American Indian culture, the present, rather than the future, is emphasized. Cooperation is valued over competition, and generosity and sharing are valued more than the acquisition of possessions. Traditionally, knowledge is transferred from generation to generation based on an oral tradition rather than a written one.

Another consideration when examining the influence of the home environment and the family on student achievement is what the culture defines as the "family." Drawing again on American Indians as an example, Sipes (1993) explained that this culture views the family not as an individual social unit but as an extension of the clan. She stated: "Each relative or member was formally or informally delegated to guide, counsel or teach the children that belonged of the clan. All cousins were treated as siblings, and all aunts and uncles shared parental functions" (p. 160). When examining the influence of the home environment on student achievement in school, cultural traditions and orientations must be considered so that ways of knowing that differ from the cultural practices reflected by the school are taken into account.

Family Involvement at School

Family involvement can take many forms as previously discussed in Epstein's (1996) six types of involvement. Family involvement at the school can include volunteering in classrooms, providing enrichment activities to support the curriculum, and participating in decision making and fundraising activities. Family members as decision makers participate in running the school in numerous ways, including being members of site-based councils and budget committees. An example of this is what some call the "radical" Chicago public schools Local School Councils

(LSC) (Fine, 1993; Smylie, Crowson, Chou, & Levin, 1996). An LSC is an 11-member committee at each school consisting of six parents, two community representatives, two teachers, and the principal. The LSC has broad powers, including the ability to hire and fire the principal, control the school site budget, and determine the curricula (Fine, 1993; Smylie, Crowson, Chou, & Levin, 1996).

The Chicago LSCs are an effort to reform schools by restructuring and transferring power to families. Epstein (1993) pointed out that in the Chicago project key players, the teachers, were not involved in designing the restructuring reform and thus view membership on the LSC as "tokenism." Thus a partnership based on families, schools, and communities working together will not develop. Epstein stated,

> Distinctions between power and partnership are not mere semantics. The politics of power often yield conflict and disharmony. The politics of partnership stress equity and caring relationships. (p. 715)

It cannot be determined from the research I reviewed if family involvement *at school* has a significant impact on raising student achievement, or if family involvement at school contributes to improving the ability of family members to fulfill their role as a teacher of their children and altering the environment *at home*. Family members who participate as volunteers, in decision making roles on school advisory boards, on budget committees, or as site council members have increased interactions with teachers and are more aware of the school programs and expectations than family members who are not involved in those roles. Many programs that contain a family involvement at school component also provide training and education activities for families to use at home. Gillum (1977) compared three Michigan school districts that developed family involvement programs and found that the program that contained intensive training for administrators, parents, and teachers reported the greatest gains in student achievement. This program also provided training for families to reinforce the program at home. Thus, it is difficult to determine if involvement at school or at home, or a combination of both, contributed to the gains.

It is also not clear from the research I reviewed if family participation on school governance councils is significantly related to improving student achievement (Jesse, 1996; Moles, 1993; Rutherford, Billig, & Kettering, 1993). Several states, including Oregon, California, and South Carolina, require local school councils to have family representation, although they do not have as far-reaching powers as the Chicago LSC described above. Jesse (1996) mentioned that the establishment of site-based decision making is becoming a common method of inviting family and community involvement in schools, even if the effectiveness of site-based decision making is not yet clear.

Role of Community Involvement to Student's Healthy Development and Achievement

Community interactions involve children participating in community-based programs, extracurricular activities, community involvement with the schools, and services provided by community agencies. These community interactions may be the result of outreach by the school or may be the result of outreach by community organizations or clubs and not be involved with the school at all. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1992) reported that there are more than 17,000 youth-serving organizations operating in the United States. They include national organizations such as the Boy Scouts and 4-H Clubs and many small local organizations such as religious youth groups and parks and recreation programs. Clark (1990) and Joekel (1985) both report a positive relationship between children's participation in community activities and children's achievement and development.

Table 1 shows the percentage of eighth graders participating in out-of-school activities (Carnegie

Council on Adolescent Development, 1992). Note that gender does not appear to be a factor in total participation in non-school activities; however, there are differences in participation levels when race/ethnicity and SES quartile membership is considered. White children and children in the highest SES quartile participate in non-school activities more often than do non-white children and children in lower SES quartiles.

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1992) indicated that community programs are developmentally appropriate for early adolescents and can contribute to their healthy development and socialization skills. Community organizations provide opportunities for adolescents to socialize with peers and adults, develop skills, have membership in a group, contribute to the community, and build self esteem.

Brown and Steinberg (1991) examined non-instructional influences on adolescents and found that participation in extracurricular activities had a positive association with school outcomes. The type of extracurricular activity the adolescent engaged in was found to be associated with the level of school achievement. As shown on Table 1, 71.3% of eighth grades students participate in non-school activities. The greatest percentage, 37.3%, participate

Table 1

Percentage of Eighth Graders Participating in Community-Based Groups

	Any Non-School Activity	Scouts	Boys or Girls Club	"Y" or Other Youth Group	4-H	Religious Youth Groups	Hobby Clubs	Neighborhood Clubs	Non-School Team Sports
Total	71.3	14.2	10.7	15.3	9.3	33.8	15.5	12.7	37.3
GENDER:									
Female	71.8	9.8	10.2	16.2	10.0	37.9	13.9	11.7	29.9
Male	70.7	18.9	11.2	14.3	8.5	29.5	17.1	13.6	45.1
RACE/ETHNICITY:									
Asian/Pacific Islander	67.9	13.1	9.1	12.7	4.7	27.4	16.7	11.8	32.0
Hispanic	60.3	10.9	13.2	13.9	6.1	24.6	15.5	13.3	31.3
Black	65.6	20.0	23.7	23.0	13.8	30.0	22.4	23.4	33.9
White	74.4	13.7	8.1	14.3	9.1	36.6	14.1	10.7	39.1
American Indian/ Pacific Islander	60.9	17.3	18.0	15.7	10.0	27.5	20.6	17.6	34.1
SES QUARTILE:									
Lowest Quartile	60.0	12.9	14.5	14.0	11.1	22.7	16.3	14.1	29.5
25-49%	68.5	13.6	11.1	15.5	10.0	30.1	15.0	13.3	35.6
50-74%	74.2	14.4	9.5	14.8	9.4	35.9	15.1	11.6	38.4
Highest Quartile	82.6	16.0	8.0	16.7	6.7	45.6	15.5	11.7	45.2
LOCATION:									
Urban	69.1	15.2	14.6	17.9	5.9	29.6	17.7	16.7	35.6
Suburban	71.5	14.0	9.1	14.2	7.1	33.3	14.9	11.3	40.0
Rural	72.8	13.9	9.9	14.8	14.9	37.9	14.7	11.2	35.1

Source: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1992, pp. 68-69).

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in non-school team sports activities. The second greatest percentage, 33.8%, participate in religious youth groups.

Although all types of participation were significant in increasing student achievement, students who participated in major sports such as football, basketball, baseball, or performing activities had lower grade point averages (GPAs) than students who were active in leadership activities, clubs, or interest groups. They also found that part-time work had an influence on achievement. Students who worked less than 10 hours per week performed better than students without jobs, but students who worked more than 10 hours per week had lower GPAs and spent less time doing homework.

Community-based programs, 4-H, YWCA and YMCA youth programs, scouting programs, sports clubs, neighborhood centers, after school and summer programs, community service activities, religious youth groups, and other programs designed to provide activities for early adolescents also appear to be related to achievement. Clark (1990) found that constructive activities that engaged students for about 20 hours a week--which involved thinking while doing the activity, and supervision by knowledgeable community members acting as teachers with established standards and exceptions--contributed to learning and development. Joekel (1985) reported that when examining influences on future achievement, participation in extracurricular activities was more indicative of success than high grades in high school, high grades in college, or high scores on the ACT.

The school's stance regarding community use of facilities and the community support of the school are indicative of higher levels of student achievement as well. Armor (1976) found that schools that provide space with equipment or services that are useful to the community, space provided in the school for parents, and outreach programs that benefitted the community are indicative of schools with high degrees of school-community interactions, and higher achievement of students in reading.

The effects of coordinated services by community agencies on children's healthy development and achievement are not clear. Although there are indications of benefits of coordinated services, much of the literature revolves around whether coordinated services should be provided in schools or in neighborhoods (Capper, 1996). One program, Project PRIDE (located in San Marcos, Texas), does indicate that collaboration between a wide range of community agencies can produce positive effects for both children and families. This collaborative effort is a partnership between social agencies, businesses, families, schools, and a university. Project PRIDE focuses on multiethnic family, school, and community collaboration coordinated by social workers with participation by counselors, nurses, psychologists, and teachers (Chavkin, 1993b).

Television, computer games, and activities occurring in cyberspace exist with the permission of society and have a direct influence on early adolescents' healthy development and academic achievement.[2] There appears to be a relationship between the hours of television viewing and adolescent healthy development and achievement. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1995) reported that adolescents who watch in excess of five hours of television a day are much more likely to be obese than those who watch less than one hour per day. They also report that "Passive consumption of commercial television can lead to attention deficits, nonreflective thinking, irrational decision making, and confusion between external reality and packaged representations" (p. 116). There also appears to be a negative relationship between heavy television viewing and student achievement on reading tests (Huston et al., 1992).

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[2] Bronfenbrenner (1979) did not include the media as a part of the microsystem because it is not a direct setting for interaction and did not address children's exposure to cyberspace because it did not exist at the time. However, interactive computer games and the use of the Internet take place in the physical space where the child is and is an activity that the child engages in by herself/himself or with others, so I consider it part of the microsystem and an appropriate topic for discussion in this section.

The widespread use of cyberspace and "virtual reality" video and computer games by adolescents is so new that little is known regarding their influence. Information available on the Internet includes explicit material, and video and computer games are often very violent. Although we do not know the influence of violent video and computer games on children, we do know that excessive television watching of violent programs can contribute to aggressive behavior (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995). Additional research is required to determine if the same is true for violent video and computer games.

Summary

Specific types of family interactions with children in the home, participation in extracurricular activities, and participation in community-based activities appear to have a positive effect on children's school achievement and social development. However, it is not clear from the research if family involvement *at school* is a significant factor in raising student achievement, or if family involvement at school contributes to improving the learning environment *at home*.

Factors that Shape the Formation of Partnerships at the Middle Level: Obstacles and Opportunities

Despite the indications from research of the benefits of school, family, and community partnerships, there are numerous obstacles to the formation of these partnerships. Perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs regarding partnerships may differ dramatically between and among the family, school, and community members. This is true regardless of the participants' class, ethnicity, or cultural background. However, the obstacles presented by differing perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs are exacerbated when teachers and parents come from different cultures, races, or class backgrounds, or when they view themselves as different from other groups because of membership in a different culture, race, or class (Chavkin, 1993b; Epstein & Dauber, 1989).

One purpose of the present study is to examine obstacles to and opportunities for partnerships by looking at characteristics of the middle school and the perceptions, attitudes, and expectations of families, teachers, and community members. The perception of what relationships are possible and desirable depends in part on the role of the one perceiving the relationship. Families, teachers, and community members may differ in their perceptions, attitudes, and expectations of what is possible and desirable. They may also differ in their understanding of what other groups expect of them.

Middle School: Obstacles and Opportunities

The transition from elementary school to the middle school can be unsettling for families and children. The middle school is often out of their neighborhood and, thus, more difficult to visit. The large size of many middle schools and departmentalization of content areas often result in students having several teachers, and thereby makes it difficult for both families and teachers to build relationships (Epstein & Connors, 1993).

The middle school curriculum also may intimidate some families. They may lack the skills to assist children with homework. Parents and children may also be confused regarding the role families should play in assisting with homework (Rutherford, Billig, & Kettering, 1993).

Early adolescent development in itself can be an obstacle to the formation of partnerships. Early adolescent development results in physical, mental, and social changes for children (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Children want more independence from their families but also need support and reassurance. The peer group becomes a key factor in adolescent social development (Epstein & Connors, 1993).

Early adolescents may not want their family involved with the school or community activities of which they are a part.

Characteristics of early adolescent development such as the search for independence, the need to explore and test new relationships, and the response to peer pressure can be obstacles to the formation of partnerships. However, these same characteristics--if considered in the development of the curriculum and instructional design--can also provide an opportunity for the development of partnerships. Service learning programs are an example of how the characteristics of early adolescent development "fit" with active learning opportunities in the community. Schine (1996) pointed out:

> Not only does service learning address a number of the traditional goals of the middle school (e.g., education for citizenship, career exploration, reinforcement of basic skills), but it is also uniquely responsive to the traits of young adolescents--to the need to test oneself, to try on adult roles, to experiment with new relationships, to be trusted, to "connect" with a world beyond the school and family. Finally, service learning is seen as a way to counteract the climate of violence and alienation that colors the lives of so many young people. It also encourages the dawning altruism that is an often-suppressed characteristic of today's youth. (p. 3)

Family Perceptions: Obstacles and Opportunities

There are numerous factors that shape the way families are involved in their children's education. Among these factors are: (a) the family's perception of what their role should be, (b) the family's sense of their ability to help their children, and (c) the family's ability to respond to opportunities to interact with the school and with their children at home (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Moles, 1993).

Many families, especially recent immigrant and minority families, may view their role in their children's education differently than the school views their role. Hispanic and Southeast Asian immigrants often come from countries where the protective model is the cultural norm. Because parental involvement in their native country is viewed as interference, these families perceive that they are being respectful by maintaining a distance from the school. From this perspective, questioning the actions of the school or teachers would be inappropriate (Moles, 1993; Yap & Enoki, 1995).

A family's belief in their ability to help their children is grounded in their own history and socialization patterns. A family's social class, how a family member's parents were involved with their education, and how a family's friends are involved in schools influence how families perceive their role. Families whose members grew up in generational poverty and have limited education are less likely to have interactions with the schools than middle-class parents (Moles, 1993). Family members with a limited education may also lack the confidence to help their children at home (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Jesse, 1996; Lightfoot, 1978; Moles, 1993; Swap, 1993). Moles concluded that "factors associated with poverty and limited education exert more influence in school contacts than minority status" (p. 27). Poverty, undereducation, cultural differences, and minority status present difficult social and psychological barriers for families to overcome in becoming involved with their children's school (Moles, 1993).

Families' social class membership can influence the way that they respond to opportunities to interact with the school. Lareau (1987) observed first grade students at two elementary schools and interviewed family members, teachers, and the principals of the two schools in the study. She found that middle class families viewed themselves as partners with the teachers while the working class families were more likely to question their own educational capabilities and placed more responsibility on the teacher to be in charge of the education of their children.

In addition, she found that the social networks of the families contributed to their knowledge of the school. The middle-class families tended to socialize with each other and shared information about the teachers and the school. The working class families socialized primarily with relatives and had little contact with other families in the school, thus limiting their opportunities to obtain informal information regarding the teachers and the school. Families' ability to respond to opportunities to interact with the school and with their children at home is also influenced by social class, family structure, employment obligations, the need for child care, transportation difficulties, inconvenient meeting times, and limited financial resources to provide materials for their children (Lareau, 1987; Leitch & Tangri, 1988; Moles, 1993; Yap & Enoki, 1995).

For some families, these obstacles may appear impossible to overcome. Schools can help to make it possible for families to respond to opportunities to participate in schools by addressing some of these issues. Some schools have been successful in overcoming these obstacles by having meetings on weekends, providing child care, arranging for transportation, and having interpreters available for non-English speaking families (Moles, 1993).

There are indications that family apathy may also be an obstacle to family involvement. Markert (1997) pointed out that quantitative studies such as those done by Elam, Rose, and Gallup (1992) indicated that families do want to be involved with their children and are willing to volunteer at their children's school. However, Markert reported findings from focus groups that indicate that family members' responses in quantitative studies reporting a desire to be involved with their children may be misleading. By looking beyond the

> convenient, facile answers . . . it became apparent that the parents themselves were largely apathetic in deeds (not words) and failed to provide much guidance in the home that would reinforce the schoolroom experience. (p. 154)

This may indicate a conflict between a family's perception of what their role should be and their willingness to accept responsibility for fulfilling that role.

Despite the obstacles to family involvement, there are also opportunities that can lead to the development of partnerships. Quantitative studies conducted by Dauber and Epstein (1993) and Chavkin and Williams (1993) found that families do want to be involved with their children's education. Dauber and Epstein examined family attitudes and involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. Questionnaires from 2,317 families indicated that families want teachers to advise them regarding how to help their children at home and also want information about what children are expected to learn each year.

Chavkin and Williams (1993) used questionnaires to study the attitudes and practices of minority families with children in elementary school. The sample included 1,779 Anglo families, 682 African American families, and 506 Hispanic families. They found that Hispanic, African-American, and Anglo families all wanted more information from the school regarding their children's successes at school. Families from all ethnic groups wanted to be involved with the school and want information and activities that they can do with their children. Chavkin and Williams also found that families want to be actively involved in a variety of roles in their children's education.

There were three areas in which Chavkin and Williams (1993) found differences in perceptions between minority families and Anglo families. In response to the statement, "Teachers should be in charge of getting parents involved in the school" (p. 76), 62% of the minority families agreed. However, less than 38% of the Anglo families agreed. In response to the statement, "School districts should make rules for involving parents"

(p. 76), 79% of the African-American families and 75% of the Hispanic families agreed. However, only 49% of the Anglo families agreed. In response to the statement, "Working parents do not have time to be involved in school activities" (p. 76), 38% of the Hispanic families and 32% of the African-American families agreed, but only 14% of the Anglo families agreed.

The practices of teachers and policies of schools to involve families can result in increased family participation regardless of the family's educational level, minority status, or socioeconomic level. The teachers' practices and school policies and practices also can overcome the obstacles given above (Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein & Dauber, 1989).

Teacher Perspectives: Obstacles and Opportunities

Teachers face some of the same obstacles to participating in partnerships as families. Teachers are human beings who also have roles as family members and community members. Moles (1993) pointed out that teachers are often parents, may be single parents, and face some of the same difficulties in responding to opportunities to develop partnerships as the families they serve.

Lack of training for teachers regarding how to communicate and interact with parents is often cited as an obstacle to the implementation of partnerships (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Chrispeels, 1993; Comer, 1980; Moles, 1993; Rich, 1988; Riley, 1994; Swap, 1993; Young & Edwards, 1996). As a result, teachers may have difficulty communicating with all families but especially with families from cultures and socioeconomic groups that are different from the teachers'. This results in frustration and misconceptions on the part of teachers and families.

Teachers also may feel threatened by family and community involvement in the school. Ryan and Freidlaender (1996) found that normative tensions can develop if teachers perceive that families are overstepping their bounds and that parental scrutiny is viewed as a threat or as questioning their expert status as educators. When accompanied by "teacher bashing," continual public criticism, accusations that teachers are not "professional" (Spencer, 1996), perceptions that the public does not trust them (Hartoonian, 1991), and continual budget cuts, low teacher morale can develop. This can contribute to an unwillingness on the part of teachers to take on what they perceive as extra work. Suggestions such as increasing contacts with families, serving on partnership teams, and writing newsletters can be perceived as additional burdens to already overworked teachers (Moles, 1993).

Wave after wave of reform movements calling for teachers to change practices, only to be followed by another wave of reform and again asking teachers to change, may contribute to some professionals resisting attempts at reform. Innovations involving the introduction of practices that are the latest "fad" and do not take into consideration the norms of the school, the classroom circumstances, or the teacher's voices contribute to teacher resistance to implement them (Spencer, 1996). As a result, policies are often ignored or redesigned by teachers in application to meet their current practices (Smylie, 1996).

There is evidence to suggest that teacher beliefs and misconceptions of family attitudes contribute to barriers developing between teachers and families. Leitch and Tangri (1988) found that some teachers blame families for their children's problems and see family attitudes as obstacles to developing home-school partnerships. Dauber and Epstein (1993) found that teachers in inner city schools perceived that parents did not want to be involved with schools. Lightfoot (1978) referred to this perception as a myth. Research done by Epstein and Dauber (1989) found that inner city families do want to be involved in their children's education. However, the perception by teachers that families do not want involvement with their children's education results in less effort on the part of the teacher to involve them, which results in less family involvement. This dynamic results in a self-fulfilling prophecy that leaves the teacher questioning her or his ability to involve families.

Teachers' beliefs regarding the value of family involvement and a recognition of the teacher's responsibility in communicating with families indicate opportunities for the development of partnerships. Dauber and Epstein (1993) found that despite the obstacles, teachers believe that parent involvement can aid in children's achievement and, thereby, help them to be more successful teachers. Harris, Kagay, and Roass (1987) found that 69% of the teachers thought it was important to provide families with information regarding what is being taught at school. More than 95% of the teachers felt it was the teacher's responsibility to communicate with families and provide information about helping their children.

Studies of family involvement indicate that the actions taken by teachers will influence the amount and type of family involvement at home. Dauber and Epstein (1993) found that

> The strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and at home are the specific school programs and teacher practices that encourage and guide parent involvement. Regardless of parent education, family size, student ability, or school level (elementary or middle school), parents are more likely to become partners in their children's education if they perceive that the schools have strong practices to involve parents at school . . . (p. 61)

When teachers provided leadership in promoting family participation in home learning activities, Epstein (1991) found significant positive changes in reading achievement. Increased communication between families and teachers provided families with more knowledge about the instructional program. The family's increased knowledge about the instructional program had a positive influence on student achievement.

Community Perceptions: Obstacles and Opportunities

The obstacles to coordination of community programs with schools and families revolve around time and money. Community-based programs that provide extracurricular activities are often led by volunteers who must find time to participate. The volunteers may not be trained to work with young adolescents, and many programs meet only for an hour or two a week (Carnegie Council on Adolescent

Development, 1995). Budget cuts for parks and recreation facilities, as well as health and social service providers, have hampered efforts to meet the needs of children (Ryan & Freidlaender, 1996).

Many young adolescents are prevented from participating in activities away from school or home because of lack of transportation. This is a problem for adolescents from low income families as well as for those in suburban and rural areas with inadequate public transportation systems. The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1995) stated that "some 29%--approximately five-and-a-half million young adolescents--are not served by any of the existing youth organizations" (p. 37).

Another obstacle to community participation in the schools is the separation of the educational system from the community. Brandt (1995) mentioned that separating academic education from ties in the community and the world of work is a recent development. Prior to the Industrial Age apprentice programs were used to educate adolescents and as apprentices they became a part of the community (Abbott, 1995).

Providing social services in the schools can be blocked by a variety of conflicting interests. Families, teachers, and other community members may have strong convictions regarding sex education or other issues they fear will be introduced by social service providers in the schools.

Turf issues between schools and agencies and between multiple agencies can result from both power struggles and different service philosophies, professional culture, and different goals. Families and teachers are often frustrated by the confusing and often unresponsive bureaucracy surrounding some service agencies. Not being able to find the appropriate service, arbitrary service boundaries, qualifying restrictions, and professional jargon contribute to this frustration (Cibulka & Kritek, 1996; Ryan & Freidlaender, 1996).

There are recent trends that are providing opportunities for increased community-school partnerships. Partnerships that are developing between schools and service organizations are providing opportunities for middle level children to learn in a variety of settings. Service learning programs are linking early adolescents to the community in ways that benefit both the community and the schools (Schine, 1996). Service learning projects not only meet community needs but also promote a sense of caring for others and extend the curriculum learned in school to application in the community (Kurth, 1995).

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1992) report, A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Nonschool Hours, provided an opportunity for information to be dispersed to a large audience regarding the need and benefits of after school activities for adolescents. The suggestions made in the report are being used in San Francisco, Chicago, and Denver to examine how both public and private groups can better serve adolescents (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995). The Carnegie Council's 1995 report Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century, provides a list of characteristics that are traits of responsive community programs.

- Are safe and accessible to all youths.
- Base their content and methods on a systematic assessment of community needs and existing services, and on knowledge of the attributes and interests of youth.
- Work with a variety of other community organizations and government agencies to extend their reach to the most vulnerable adolescents.
- Have staff who are knowledgeable about adolescent development and are trained to work with young people.
- Regard young people as resources in planning and program development and involve them in meaningful roles.
- Reach out to families, schools, and other community partners to create a strong social support system for young adolescents.

> - Have clear objectives and criteria for evaluation of success.
>
> - Have strong advocates for and with youths to improve their opportunities to become well-educated and healthy.
>
> - Have active, committed community leadership on their boards. (pp. 36-37)

Collaboration between community service agencies, families, and schools is an opportunity to provide services to children both in their neighborhood and at school. Family resource centers, established to provide families with services, have been mandated by the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (Smrekar, 1996). These centers, some located in the community and some located in schools, strive to coordinate services for families, schools, and agencies.

Developing partnerships between community agencies, community members, and schools is also an opportunity for schools and service providers to break down the maze of bureaucracy that often makes finding the appropriate services difficult not only for families but also for teachers (Kritek, 1996). The Dallas public schools have overcome some of the obstacles resulting from this maze in the process of establishing Youth and Family Centers near or on school campuses. Bush and Wilson (1997) report that with "a major effort and considerable determination" (p. 40) they were able to cross train members of three large bureaucracies (The Parkland Health and Hospital System, the Dallas Mental Health-Mental Retardation Agency, and the Dallas School District) to provide comprehensive integrated services for families and children. The lessons learned by the Dallas public schools and the agencies involved can help other schools and community agencies to develop programs that effectively provide services to families and children.

The next section presents the middle school philosophy and gives characteristics of effective middle schools.

Effective Middle Level Schools

Effective middle level schools are unique in providing programs that address the developmental needs of early adolescents. They are not "mini" or junior high schools, and they are not elementary schools. This section discusses the middle school philosophy and characteristics of effective middle schools.

The Middle School Philosophy

William Alexander is referred to as the "Father of the American Middle School." In 1962 Alexander set forth a vision of the middle school as an alternative to junior high school. This vision became the basis of what is referred to as the "middle school philosophy." He suggested that middle schools be seen as an essential component of a K-12 program, not as a bridge to high school. Unique programs that address the needs of early adolescents, provide opportunities for students to pursue individual interests, have a flexible curriculum, and challenge early adolescents to assume responsibility for their own actions should be a part of middle school (Alexander, 1995).

The National Middle School Association (1995) position paper, This We Believe, and the recommendations contained in the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) task force report, Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century, list characteristics and suggestions for effective middle schools that expand the middle school philosophy and give direction to what is referred to as the "middle school movement" or "middle grades reform." The terms "middle school philosophy," "middle school movement," or "middle grades reform" are synonyms that refer to efforts to establish educational programs for early adolescents that are: "1) developmentally responsive, 2) academically excellent, and 3) socially equitable" (Lipsitz, Mizell, Jackson, & Austin, 1997, p. 534).

The National Middle School Association (1995) position paper, This We Believe, presents a vision for the characteristics and practices found in developmentally responsive middle level schools:

> National Middle School Association Believes:
>
> DEVELOPMENTALLY RESPONSIVE MIDDLE LEVEL SCHOOLS
> ARE CHARACTERIZED BY:
>
> Educators committed to young adolescents
> A shared vision
> High expectations for all
> An adult advocate for every student
> Family and community partnerships
> A positive school climate
>
> THEREFORE, DEVELOPMENTALLY RESPONSIVE MIDDLE LEVEL
> SCHOOLS PROVIDE:
>
> Curriculum that is challenging, integrative,
> and exploratory
>
> Varied teaching and learning approaches
> Assessment and evaluation that promote learning
> Flexible organizational structures
> Programs and policies that foster health,
> wellness, and safety
> Comprehensive guidance and
> support services. (p. 10)

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) report, Turning Points, made eight recommendations to improve the education of early adolescents. These included: (a) the establishment of small communities within the school with teachers and students grouped together in teams where close relationships are nurtured and valued, (b) a strong academic program with youth service as a part of the academic program, (c) elimination of tracking and promotion of cooperative learning, (d) teachers and administrators with the authority to make decisions about the educational program together with more responsibility for students' performance, (e) middle grade teachers who have been specially prepared to teach at the middle level, (f) promotion of health and fitness to improve academic performance, (g) involvement of families in middle schools by including them in meaningful ways in school governance and giving families opportunities and information to enable them to support their children both at school and at home, and (h) connection between schools and communities by utilizing community service opportunities and using community resources for after-school activities.

Effective Middle Level Schools

Evaluating the effectiveness of middle schools that have attempted to implement the middle school philosophy is difficult. George and Alexander (1993) pointed out that research is needed to determine which features of middle schools result in student attainment and social development. The Project on High Performance Learning Communities (hereafter referred to as the Project) established in 1989 is attempting to determine what works at both the policy level and the school level to sustain reforms in teaching and learning. "It conducts large-scale, theory-driven, and theory-testing evaluation of the impact of major reform initiatives" (Felner, Kasak, Mulhall, & Flowers, 1997, p. 521). The Project has one division that focuses on middle level reform.

A longitudinal study conducted by the Project examined school reform using the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development's (1989) report Turning Points' eight recommendations (listed above) as a broad theoretical framework. The actual implementation of the recommendations were tracked and an evaluation of their impact was made. Each recommendation is seen as being connected to the others and, as such, implementation of each recommendation is considered necessary for the other recommendations to be successfully implemented (Felner, Kasak, Mulhall, & Flowers, 1997).

The 31 schools in the study were classified as to their level of implementation of the eight recommendations. Felner, Jackson, Kasak, Mulhall, Brand, and Flowers (1997) pointed out that "reform is an evolutionary and developmental process" (p. 532). Thus, reforms can be examined as degrees of implementation on a continuum from high levels of implementation to low levels of implementation. Schools with a high level of implementation demonstrated structural and teaching and learning recommendations as well as teacher norms and practices that addressed developmental issues of early adolescents. Schools with a partial level of implementation demonstrated that they had implemented some structural changes but had not reached levels of instructional practices that the high level schools had. Schools with a low level of implementation included schools that were not making changes and/or had just begun to make changes (Felner, Jackson, Kasak, Mulhall, Brand, & Flowers, 1997).

The findings indicate that schools with a high level of implementation (a) have higher achievement test scores in mathematics, language, and reading, (b) have lower levels of student behavioral problems, (c) have students who report lower levels of worry and fear, and (d) have students who report higher levels of self-esteem than students at schools with either partial level of implementation or low level of implementation (Felner, Jackson et al., 1997).

Maintaining the momentum to implement middle level change is difficult. Lipsitz, Mizell, Jackson, and Austin (1997) stated that

> Loss of intensity and focus has been the single greatest barrier to comprehensive and sustained middle-grades reform . . . A lack of individual will to persevere despite formidable obstacles has been the most persistent, albeit understandable, barrier to school reform. (pp. 538-539)

Both structural changes (teacher teaming, block scheduling, common planning time) and actual changes in the practices of teachers are necessary for reform to be long lasting and effective. These changes take time and involve changes in the leadership practices, the culture and norms of the school, and structures of the school (Felner, Jackson et al., 1997).

Implementation implies more than rhetoric or checkoff lists. Implementation implies that programs, policy, and practice all address the underlying issues of the recommendations (Felner, Jackson et al., 1997). For example, two of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) recommendations dealt with family, school, and community partnerships. Having an open house for families or a cleanup day at a park is not addressing the underlying issues of those recommendations. Schools need to be proactive to

> re-engage families in the education of young adolescents [and] . . . connect schools with communities, which together share responsibility for each middle grade student's success . . . (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989, pp. 9-10)

Lipsitz, Mizell, Jackson, and Austin (1997) reported that middle schools that are proactive and emphasize communication with families regarding homework, student achievement, and problems, and provided information about health and social services have increased family participation at the middle level.

Synthesis of the Literature Review

Several overlapping spheres of influence shape the development of children. As Epstein (1995) pointed out, there are times the spheres of influence--family members, teachers, and community members--act separately from each other and at other times may combine. Swap's (1993) and Epstein's typologies call our attention to the value of "true partnerships" in which working relationships between family members, community members, and teachers are focused on the same goals for the development of children. In a true partnership, those involved work on equal footing with different perspectives, but with "caring" as a core concept (Epstein, 1995).

While Epstein's (1995) and Swap's (1993) typologies have advanced our understanding of partnerships, there is still much to be learned about them, specifically at the middle level. There is a lack of information regarding the perspectives and the interactions between members of the mesosystem. How do family members, middle level teachers, and community members perceive the value of partnerships? How do family members, middle level teachers, and community members view their responsibility in the partnership? What support and encouragement are needed by family members, middle level teachers, and community members to promote participation in partnerships? What do family members, middle level teachers, and community members perceive as obstacles to the formation of partnerships at the middle level? My review of the literature does not provide answers to those questions.

The methodology used to study family, school, and community relationships has included both quantitative and qualitative studies. Chavkin and Williams (1993), Dauber and Epstein (1993), Dornbusch et al. (1987), and Elam, Rose, and Gallup (1992) carried out quantitative studies with large populations (more than 2,000 participants in each sample) to examine individual components of family, school, or community partnerships. Others such as Ginn (1994), Lareau (1987), and Markert (1997) have conducted qualitative studies limited to individual components of family, school, or community partnerships. My review of the literature did not reveal any studies that examined all three groups, family members, middle level teachers, and community members, interacting with each other in partnerships.

My review of the literature indicates there is a need for an investigation of the perceptions of family members, middle level teachers, and community members regarding their relationships with each other. The lack of research in this area led to the choice of the setting for this study and the development of the research questions.

Much of the research regarding partnerships has been from the school's perspective. Epstein (1993), Seeley (1993), and Swap (1993) have called for a vision of partnerships where the education of children is viewed as a joint effort between family members, community members, and schools. However, Ginn (1994) pointed out that research on family involvement focuses on the perspective of educators, and that families are

> Somewhat depersonalized; they are "objectified"; it is difficult to think of parents as living, breathing humans or know what involvement means for them. (p. 39)

The same point could be made regarding research on teachers and community members who work with middle level children. The ecological model facilitates movement away from our current way of thinking which disembodies family members, community members, and teachers. The ecological model helps us to view family members, community members, and teachers as "living, breathing humans" who fill multiple roles.

Research done by Lipsitz, Mizell, Jackson, and Austin (1997) has shed some light on issues specific to family involvement at middle schools that are implementing a middle school philosophy based on the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) recommendations. However, little is known regarding issues specific to the development of true partnerships between family members, middle level teachers, and community members.

This study brings together the perceptions of all three groups--family members, middle level teachers, and community members. The perceptions of family members, middle level teachers, and community members regarding their relationships with each other have not been examined at the middle level from a perspective that views all three groups as integral parts of a complex ecological system with equal standing.

The Research Question

In the formation of partnerships between families, schools, and communities, the perceptions of those most closely involved are often overlooked--the families, teachers and community members who have frequent contact with middle level students. This study focuses on the perspectives of family members, community members who are involved with middle level children, and teachers about their current role and what they perceive their role should be in working with each other to benefit middle level students. Knowledge regarding what information and support are needed by all three groups to encourage participation in partnerships will help facilitate the establishment of partnerships at the middle level.

The Research Questions

The guiding research questions are:

Q1: What are the perceptions of family members, community members, and teachers regarding their current roles in working with each other to benefit middle level students?

Q2: What are the perceptions of family members, community members, and teachers regarding what their roles should be in working with each other to benefit middle level students?

The following four more specific research questions flow from the two guiding questions:

1. What are your relationships with the other groups?
2. How do the groups view their responsibilities in the relationships?
3. What are the obstacles to the development of relationships among the groups?
4. What facilitates partnership relations among the groups to benefit middle level students?

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides a description of the theoretical orientation grounding the study and a description of the study design including a rationale for the methodological choice. It is presented in five major sections: (a) symbolic interactionism, which is the theoretical orientation of the research design, (b) the study design, (c) the site selection, subject recruitment and participants background information, (d) data analysis procedures, and (e) the study's limitations. All people and places mentioned in the study were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is an orientation to the study of human behavior which sees actions as being mediated by the interpretation people give their life-situations in interacting with others. Human life is seen as community life and as such human life cannot be understood apart from the community of which they are a member (Prus, 1996).

The four central concepts of symbolic interaction described by Blumer (1969) are:

> (1) people, individually and collectively, are prepared to act on the basis of the meanings of the objects that comprise their world; (2) the association of people is necessarily in the form of a process in which they are making indications to one another and interpreting each other's indications; (3) social acts, whether individual or collective, are constructed through a process in which the actors note, interpret, and assess the situations confronting them; and (4) the complex interlinkages of acts that comprise organization, institutions, divisions of labor, and networks of interdependency are moving and not static affairs. (p. 50)

The "objects" or "things" that have meaning for an individual can be of a physical nature such as a place or other people in specific roles such as a mother or teacher. Values, activities of others, and situations that people encounter in everyday life are also classified as "objects" or "things" that have meaning for individuals and influence individual action (Blumer, 1969).

Symbolic interactionism holds that the meanings associated with objects by an individual are modified by an internal interpretation process used by the person interacting and dealing with objects or things and other people encountered in life. The interpretation process is specific to the situation the individual is in and directs actions. This is a formative process in which meanings are used and reused to guide actions (Blumer, 1969). George Herbert Mead (Strauss, 1956) emphasized that the individual's concept of self grows out of the internal interpretation process:

> The human self arises through its ability to take the attitude of the group to which he belongs--because he can talk to himself in terms of the community to which he belongs and lay upon himself the responsibilities that belong to the community. (p. 32)

The philosophical and theoretical perspectives of symbolic interactionism support the qualitative research paradigm (Patton, 1987). In qualitative research the ways people interpret their experience are especially significant (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Family members, teachers, and community members come with differing backgrounds and experiences that influence their perceptions (how they see and interpret actions and relationships). The nature of this research inquiry--which strives to find out what the perceptions of family members, community members and teachers are regarding their current role and what they perceive their role should be in working with each other to benefit middle level students--can best be determined using qualitative research methods.

Researcher as an Instrument

The symbolic interactionist perspective is played out in the data collection activities and in the analysis of the data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) pointed out that "each of us brings to the analysis of data our biases, assumption, patterns of thinking, and knowledge gained from experience and reading" (p. 95). I have experience as the mother of a middle level child, as a middle level teacher, a teacher of talented and gifted students, a director of a talented and gifted program, a school district curriculum coordinator, a curriculum consultant, and as a community volunteer working with middle level children. Thus, I have experienced all three roles examined in this research inquiry. My experience will be helpful in developing theoretical sensitivity--"the ability to 'see' with analytic depth what is there" (p. 76). There is also the possibility that my experience will limit or obscure what is "seen."

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested several techniques to enable the researcher to use experience and knowledge in a positive manner rather than letting experience and knowledge "obscure vision" (p. 76). Their suggestions include: (a) considering potential categories to develop precise questions; (b) using a word, phrase, or sentence as the basis of analysis to probe possible meanings, reflect on assumptions and examine and question them; (c) looking at extremes of a dimension to think analytically rather than descriptively about data; (d) using systematic comparisons early in the analysis to examine critically the researcher's patterns of thinking; and (e) being aware of the use of absolute statements and words ("never," "always") and cultural assumptions regarding roles and stereotypes. I followed these suggestions.

Study Design

Following from the symbolic interactionist perspective, a study design was developed that would elicit the perceptions of family members, middle level teachers, and community members regarding working with each to benefit middle level children. This section presents the rationale for the methodological choice of focus groups. Also presented in this section are descriptions of the pilot studies, focus group procedures, the number of focus groups, participant verification, and ethical considerations.

Methodological Choice of Focus Groups

I examined the advantages and disadvantages of three major types of research designs used in qualitative research to determine the most appropriate design for this study. These are participant observation, individual interviews, and focus groups (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Morgan, 1988). Participant observation has the advantage of taking place in natural social settings where interactions occur (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Morgan, 1988). According to Morgan (1988), disadvantages associated with participant observation include often ill-defined discussion topics and a research design type typically better suited to examining roles and organizations than the perceptions of participants. An advantage of individual interviews is that the discussion topics are well defined. A disadvantage of individual interviews is that they do not provide an opportunity to observe the participant's interaction with others regarding the topic (Morgan, 1988).

Focus groups provide a middle ground for inquiry along the continuum between non-structured participant observation and structured individual interviews (Morgan, 1988). Because the researcher controls and defines the discussion topics, focus groups are more managed than participant observation methods. The participant-defined group interaction in focus groups influences the flow of the discussion and results in a less controlled setting than that associated with individual interviews, thereby facilitating the emergence of individual perceptions. Krueger (1994) pointed out that focus groups work particularly well in determining the perceptions, feelings, and manner of thinking of the participants. Thus, a research design using focus groups is the most appropriate method of collecting data in regard to the research question for this dissertation.

A major consideration in the research design was to determine whether or not the focus groups should be composed of mixed categories of membership (families, teachers and community members) or if there should be separate focus groups for each category of membership. There was the possibility in mixed groups that the discussion would turn into conflict, or that the participants would feel uncomfortable and refuse to share experiences (Morgan, 1988). In contrast, mixed groups might result in a more productive discussion and produce data and insights that might not surface without the interaction between the mixed categories.

Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1990) pointed out that groups in the sociological sense have a common identity, unity, shared norms, and goals. Focused interviews of small groupings (not groups in the sociological sense) were conducted by Merton as early as 1943. The early focus groups (or "focused interviews," using Merton's terminology) were composed of people who had a common experience (e.g., listening to a specific radio program) but who were not necessarily members of a group in the sociological sense. More recently Krueger (1994) and Morgan (1988) suggested that focus groups should be comprised of individuals who are similar to each other in some way. In this research inquiry focus groups composed of single categories of membership have the advantage of being more homogeneous than mixed categories. Homogeneous groups may also result in a more open discussion that reflects the members' perceptions in their specific role as teacher, family member, or community member without being influenced by the perceptions of the other groups (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1988).

In this research inquiry, all members of the focus groups were associated with a specific middle level school. This provided an additional common experience for the members of the focus group. Krueger (1994) cautioned that, traditionally, focus groups have been composed of people who do not know each other. However, some researchers are now questioning this necessity, especially in community-based studies (Krueger, 1994). The symbolic interactionist orientation emphasizes that perceptions and actions of individuals cannot be understood apart from the community of which they are a member (Prus, 1996); thus, all of the focus group members were from the same school community.

Pilot and Review of Instruments

The Moderator's Focus Group Guide was constructed by this author, then reviewed by an expert, a professor at Portland State University who has done research using focus groups. Several suggestions regarding the elimination of the use of "jargon" and using open-ended questions were made, and changes were made in the guide. The focus group guides are located in Appendix A.

Pilot testing of the teacher questionnaire was conducted with a class of master's degree students comprised of elementary through high school teachers, including three middle level teachers. They made suggestions regarding wording and clarification of questions. The suggestions were incorporated into the questionnaire. A pilot of the family questionnaire was done with the father of a middle level student. He suggested adding a "0" category under "Interactions with School" and wording changes similar to those suggested by the teachers' piloting the teachers questionnaire. The changes were incorporated into the questionnaire. The community member questionnaire was not pilot tested because I felt it was not necessary as a result of the similar responses to pilot tests of the teacher questionnaire and the family questionnaire. Suggestions made as a result of the pilots of the teacher questionnaire and the family questionnaire regarding wording changes were also changed on the community questionnaire. The questionnaires are included in Appendix B.

A pilot study of a single category membership focus group comprised of teachers was conducted to address the pros and cons of single category membership focus groups verses mixed category membership focus groups, to test the focus group guide, and to test the use of a scenario. The initial analysis of the data determined that productive discussions occurred in the single category membership focus group, so it was determined that there would be no need to have a mixed category membership focus group.

The revised focus group guide was also tested in the pilot focus group. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to build on each others' responses, and it was determined that no other changes needed to be made to the guide. All category of membership focus groups were asked the same questions pertaining to the other category of membership focus groups. For example, to determine the participants perceptions' regarding what would facilitate partnerships, the family members were asked "What would make it easier for you to work with teachers?" Later in the focus group session family members were asked "What would make it easier for you to work with community members?" Community members were asked "What would make it easier for you to work with teachers?" Later in the focus group session community members were asked "What would make it easier for you to work with families?"

(Appendix A). Thus, questions for all focus groups were pilot tested in the Pilot focus group.

To give "focus" to the focus group, a short scenario was included in the introduction to the focus group session. The scenario included a short summary of the literature regarding family, teacher, and community partnerships at the middle level. This served to focus the interview. Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1990) observed

> Interviews based on prior content-analysis of the matters under examination clearly allowed for more intensive elucidation by each person while not providing for the introduction of new leads simulated by others. (p. xix)

The purpose of this research inquiry is to elicit the perceptions of family members, community members, and teachers regarding partnerships, I used a scenario to help achieve these ends. Merton et al. (1990) pointed out that the use of a scenario could hinder the generation of "new leads," although it also could provide for a more in-depth explanation of the participant's perceptions. The use of a scenario in the pilot focus group did not appear to limit the generation of "new leads," so it was decided to use it in the rest of the focus group sessions.

Focus Group Procedures

I acted as the facilitator and moderator for the focus group sessions. An assistant moderator was also present to aid me in greeting focus group members. The assistant moderator (a doctoral student completing a research practicum) attended the focus group session and took notes.

A "welcoming" atmosphere was established for the participants. Beverages and light snacks were served as the participants arrived for the meetings at Portland State University. Food was not allowed at the Lake Community Library, so none was served to the participants of the third family focus group. Participants were asked to fill out a short questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide background information that would enrich the analysis of the focus group's data. The questionnaire asked for demographic data and elicited information regarding how the participants were involved with middle level children and schools. Epstein's (1996) six categories of involvement provided the framework for the questions. Each group (families, teachers, and community members) received a different questionnaire that was designed specifically to elicit information regarding their role.

Each focus group session was approximately 90 to 120 minutes long. The sessions held at Portland State University were both audio taped and video taped. The audio tape was used to generate a transcript of the interview. The videotape was used to support the audio tape and to provide nonverbal interaction information.

Krueger (1994) and Morgan (1988) both cautioned that videotaping can be obtrusive and intrusive, change the environment, and influence participant spontaneity. However, I believed that a videotape of the focus group sessions was necessary to determine who was speaking and to whom participants were speaking. To mediate the intrusive effects of videotaping, all of the focus groups except the one held at the Lake Community Library took place in a room with a video camera located in the ceiling. The participants were informed that the session would be both audio taped and videotaped and the video camera on the ceiling was pointed out.

The third family member focus group held in the Lake Community Library was not videotaped. The room used did not have a built-in video camera. A decision was made not to videotape the focus group because I felt it would be too intrusive. It was audio taped and the participants were informed that it was being audio taped.

Additional data was obtained in the form of notes taken by the assistant moderator during the focus group. The assistant moderator's notes included a record of the key points made by the participants and observations made during the focus group. The assistant moderator did not take part in the discussion or ask questions which enabled the assistant to concentrate on the conversation taking place during the focus group.

Immediately after each focus group the moderator and assistant moderator had a debriefing session to capture their impressions of the session. The debriefing sessions after the second and subsequent focus groups compared and contrasted information from earlier focus groups.

Number of Focus Groups

After each focus group analysis was completed to determine if additional focus groups were needed, and to determine if theoretical saturation had been reached in each category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Theoretical saturation has taken place according to Strauss and Corbin when:

> (1) no new or relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category; (2) the category development is dense, insofar as all of the paradigm elements are accounted for, along with variation and process; (3) the relationships between categories are well established and validated. (p. 188)

Two focus groups were held with middle level teachers. Each session had six participants. The conversations covered all categories and reveled a range of paradigm elements. Thus, it was determined that no additional teacher focus groups were needed.

Three focus groups were held with family members. Only three of the nine family members who committed to attending came to the first focus group. The conversation was useful but I felt that additional sessions would contribute to the study. At the second family focus group meeting only four of the seven family members who had committed to attending the session showed up. The conversation in the second family focus group covered all categories and reveled a range of paradigm elements, however, it was determined that a third family focus group would contribute to the study because of there were only four participants in the focus group. At the third family focus group nine of the eleven family members who had committed to attending the meeting came. At the conclusion of the third family focus group it was determined that theoretical saturation had been achieved and no additional family member focus groups were necessary.

One focus group with six participants was held with community members. The participants represented a wide spectrum of community organizations and types of involvement with middle level children. The focus group was very productive with dense category development. The spectrum of community organizations and types of involvement provided a variety of paradigm elements. Because of the quality of the focus group discussion and the difficulty of recruiting participants, as discussed later in this chapter, I determined that no additional community member focus groups would be held.

Participant Verification

Participant verification of the data was done using the methods suggested by Krueger (1994). This verification, or "member checking," ensured that I understood the intent of participants. Krueger stated that

> the most immediate and often most beneficial feedback occurs at the end of the focus group itself . . . . Participants are invited to amend or change this oral summary and then if suggestions are offered, the group is asked to confirm or correct the new ideas. (pp. 137-138)

The assistant moderator gave a brief summary of the major points made by the participants. The participants were then asked if they had anything to add or change.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the focus groups was voluntary. The participants, informed of the nature of the research, signed an informed consent form approved by the Portland State University Human Subjects Review Committee. The participants' identities are protected. The names of all participants were changed in the report of the findings to ensure confidentiality. Only the researcher and the dissertation committee have had access to uncoded data.

Site, Participant Selection, and Participant Background

The need for research regarding partnerships at a middle school was the major consideration in determining the site for this study. Other reasons also influenced the site selection. I found a situation where the administration supported the study and access to people and documents was easily achieved as a result. This section is presented in five parts. First, considerations leading to the choice of River Middle School as the site for this study are presented including background information about the community of Lake, the student population, and implementation of the middle school philosophy. In the second part, a general overview of participant selection and recruitment procedures are given. The last three sections present recruitment procedures, demographics, and background information specific to each group of family members, teachers, and community members.

Considerations Leading to the Selection of River Middle School as the Site of the Study

River Middle School was chosen as the site for this study for two reasons. I have supervised student teachers at River Middle School for three years and thus I have access to the teachers at the school and the administration of the school supported the research. This section presents: (a) an overview of the community of Lake, including student demographics and student achievement at River Middle School, (b) implementation of the middle school philosophy at River Middle School, and (c) administrative support for the study.

Overview of the community of Lake and the student population at River Middle School. Lake is a suburban town located in a metropolitan area in the Northwestern United States of America. It developed as the center of a farming community and was named after a pioneer who arrived in 1852 (McArthur, 1974). The establishment of a railroad station in the late 1800s contributed to giving the town a unique identity. Rapid growth in the community has resulted in the old "downtown" area of the city being bypassed by a major highway with strip development and suburban shopping centers. To find the "downtown" area, it is necessary to turn off of the major highway. The old downtown area appears to be thriving with new apartments, local shops, feed stores, and older buildings that provide a feeling of continuity and community.

A regional shopping center and the establishment of large corporate businesses in Lake have contributed to the rapid commercial growth in the city. Gerber, Heyer, McCutcheon, Walker, and Wolfe (1996) found that people in the community made a distinction between the local commercial community and the larger commercial community. The local commercial community was described as being comprised of "mom and pop" type businesses. The larger commercial community was described as large corporations without ties to the local community. There was a feeling of pride in supporting schools and being involved in the community on the part of the "locals" but resentment was expressed toward the large corporations that did not appear to support the schools (Gerber et al., 1996).

The estimated population of Lake in 1996 was 36,083. The mean annual increase in population between 1991-1996 was 1,050 people. This represents a mean population growth of 3.2% per year. The estimated median household income for the State of Ocean in 1997 was $40,700 (Personal communication with Alan Stobic of the Ocean Economic Analysis Section of the Ocean Employment Division, September 10, 1997). The estimated median household income in Lake for 1996 was $46,369, indicating a predominately middle socioeconomic level a with a median household income higher than that of the state as a whole. However, when driving through the city, and particularly the attendance area of River Middle School, there is evidence of considerable diversity in housing and neighborhoods. Modest rural residences with barns and horses and small houses on small lots are intermingled with warehouses within walking distance of River Middle

School. There are older neighborhoods with small ranch style houses, new planned communities with lakes and parks, gated estates, and areas with apartment houses. There are also areas that maintain a rural atmosphere with orchards and large older homes.

What is now River Middle School was opened as a junior high school in 1973. The junior high school was designed to accommodate 400 students in the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades. In 1991 it was converted to a middle school housing 6th, 7th, and 8th graders.

During the 1996-1997 school year between 874 and 895 students were enrolled in River Middle School. This represents an increase of 13% over the past 4 years. Twenty-four percent of the students were on free or reduced lunches during the 1996-1997 school year. This is a 5% increase from the 1995-1996 school year and an 8% increase from the 1993-1994 school year.

The students at River Middle School are predominately middle class. Racially they are predominately white. However, the racial and ethnic population of the student body is becoming increasingly diverse. The population of Hispanic students has increased by 93% from the 1993-1994 school year. This is an increase from 29 Hispanic students to 56 Hispanic students. Hispanic students make up 6.41% of the school population. The population of African American students has also increased. From six in the 1993-1994 school year to 12 in the 1996-1997 school year. Although this represents a 100% increase in the number of African American students from the 1993-1994 school year to the 1996-1997 school year, they only represented 1.37% of the school population. Asian/Pacific Islander students numbered 54 during the 1996-1997 school year. The Asian/Pacific Islander population has steadily increased by 26% from the 1993-1994 school year. They represented 6.17% of the school population in 1996-1997.

Table 2 shows the racial heritage of students at River Middle School from the 1993-1994 school year through the 1996-1997 school year.

Table 2

Racial Heritage of Students at River Middle School
1996-1997 School Year

	African American		Asian/Pacific Islander		Hispanic		White	
Year	Number of Students	% of School	Number of Students	% of School	Number of Students	% of School	Number of Students	% of School
1996-1997	12	1.37%	54	6.17%	56	6.41%	749	85.70%
1995-1996	8	.95%	56	6.64%	36	4.27%	742	88.01%
1994-1995	7	.87%	48	5.96%	29	3.60%	719	89.31%
1993-1994	6	.77%	43	5.54%	29	3.74%	695	89.68%

The 1997 Ocean Statewide Assessment Program results for 8th grade students were used to indicate the academic achievement of River Middle School students. The results of the "Intact Group," that is, students who indicated that they attended River Middle School in the 7th grade, were used. The "Comparison Group Range," schools with similar socioeconomic characteristics, was used to indicate achievement. The Intact Group (n = 243) represented 83.79% of the total number of students (n = 290) who took the reading and literature tests. The total reading and literature scores indicate that 64% of the River Middle School Intact Group meets or exceeds the state level of performance compared to 61% of the Comparison Group. The Intact Group (n = 234) represented 83.87% of the total number of students (n = 279) who took the mathematics tests. The total mathematics scores indicate that 61% of the River Middle School Intact Group meets or exceeds the state level of performance compared to 57% of the Comparison Group.

Implementation of the middle school philosophy at River Middle School. River Middle School began the process of implementing the middle school philosophy in 1991 when it converted from a junior high school to a middle school. The school is divided into three "regions" with teams of teachers that have common planning periods, block scheduling, and advisories. Students are assigned to a region and stay in the region for all three years. Each region has three to four sixth grade teachers, a seventh grade language arts/social studies teacher, an eighth grade language arts/social studies teacher, a seventh and eighth grade science teacher (one region also has a sixth grade science teacher), a seventh and eighth grade fitness/health teacher, a math teacher (the students are ability grouped for math and as a result may have a math teacher from another region), a learning specialist and three to four elective teachers. The electives teachers may cross regions.

Each student is assigned to a "Venture" group. This is River's advisory program. The students stay with the same teacher in the same Venture group for all three years.

River Middle School has a modified sixth grade self contained classroom program. The students have a homeroom teacher that provides most of the instruction. All sixth grade students are required to take exploration "wheel" classes. The wheel classes offer six week courses which may include performance music, fitness, technology/ computers, teen living and foreign language.

Sixth grade students have one primary teacher, their home room teacher. They may also have a math teacher and a wheel teacher. In the seventh and eighth grade the students stay in the same region, however, the organization is departmentalized and the students may have seven to eight different teachers. In addition to the core content areas seventh grade students may take one elective and eighth grade students may take two.

There is an active site council, and the school has tried to promote family and community involvement. The school has an active service learning program, and the building is used by a variety of community groups and organizations. In addition, the school exudes a welcoming atmosphere. The facility is clean and well maintained. The office personnel and front-line staff greet visitors in a friendly, "welcoming" manner. As Felner, Jackson et al. (1997) pointed out, this does not indicate that the middle school philosophy is fully implemented. Budget restraints have resulted in large class sizes and the elimination of some activities.

School administrative support for the study. A major consideration in the site selection was the researcher's access to the families, teachers, and community members. This could most easily be achieved with the support of the administration of the school. The principal of River Middle School supported the research by providing the researchers with documents, artifacts, test score results, and names and phone numbers of family members, teachers, and community members.

Overview of Participant Selection and Recruitment Procedures

This section presents a general description of the methods used to select participants and the procedures used to recruit them to participate in the focus groups. The following sections give more detailed information specific to the recruitment of each group and background information regarding the participants. Table 3 shows the number of focus groups in each category and the number of participants in each focus group session.

Table 3

Number of Focus Groups in Each Category and the Number of Participants at Each Focus Group Meeting

Category	Number of Focus Group Meetings	Number of Participants at Each Meeting			Total
Community Members	1	6			6
Middle Level Teachers	2	6	6		12
Family Members	3	3	4	8	15

(N = 33)

The participants selected to participate in the focus groups were families, teachers, and community members directly involved with middle level students. All participants were associated as a family member, teacher, or community volunteer with River Middle School. I used personal networks at River Middle School, with the permission and assistance of the school principal, to obtain a list of possible participants in the specific categories of family members with children in middle school, community volunteers who work with middle level students, and middle level teachers.

Names of community members who are involved with middle school students were obtained by contacting River Middle School, community organizations such as the Boy Scouts and 4-H, the Lake City Police Department, and churches in the community. In addition, teachers and family members were asked to suggest names. A small list of names was generated and each was contacted to participate. Each participant only participated in one focus group meeting.

Participants were recruited using methods suggested by Krueger (1994). Selected persons were invited by phone to participate in the focus groups. They were informed of my identity and the purpose of the focus group. Participants were also informed that parking would be provided. I offered a $20 incentive for participation in the second and third family member focus groups, and the community focus group. This initial contact took place three weeks before the focus group was scheduled to occur. I took field notes of the initial and subsequent phone contact with the participants.

A personalized written invitation was mailed to the participants within five days after the phone invitation. The written invitation thanked them for agreeing to participate and gave details such as the time, location, and topic of the discussion. The text of the letter, based on a sample letter suggested by Krueger (1994), is in Appendix C. A map with parking information was included with the letter for the two teacher focus groups, the first two family member focus groups, and the community member focus group. The third family member focus group, held at the Lake Community Library, did not include a map because all of the participants knew where the location of the library.

The Informed Consent Form (Appendix D) was mailed to the participants with the written invitation. They were asked to sign it and return it to me in an envelope which was enclosed with the invitation to the first five focus group meetings. The invitation to the family focus group meeting at the Lake Community Library requested that the participants bring the signed form with them to the meeting. At each focus group meeting the participants who had not returned the form were given a form to sign. This saved time at the focus group meeting and allowed more time for the actual focus group discussion.

The day before the focus group was scheduled to take place, each participant was phoned to remind them of the session. They were again thanked for agreeing to participate and told that their opinions are important to the study.

Family Member Recruitment and Background Information

Specific information regarding recruitment and background information regarding the family members who participated in the focus groups is presented in this section. It is presented in five parts: (a) family recruitment, (b) family demographics and background, (c) family members' prior experience with adolescents, (d) family members as community volunteers, and (e) family members as teachers.

Family recruitment. The 1996-1997 River Middle School Student Handbook was used to obtain names and phone numbers of family members to invite as possible participants in this study. A systematic sampling with a random start was used to select families to be contacted. One hundred eighty-eight families were phoned. Most of the phone calls were made on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings and a few calls were made on a Saturday. All of the phone calls for the first two family member focus groups were made by a doctoral student doing a research practicum who assisted me with scheduling and recruitment. For the third family member focus group the doctoral student recruited five participants and I recruited six. A total of 25 family members agreed to participate in the three family member focus groups. This represents 13.3% of those phoned. Of the 25 family members who agreed to attend focus group meetings, 15 (60%) attended.

Family members gave various reasons for not wishing to participate. The reasons included being too busy, not interested, not being "into group stuff," not wanting to go to downtown Portland, and in the case of four families contacted--they did not feel their English was good enough to participate. I offered to provide an interpreter for the families that did not speak English, but they still declined to participate. The implications of these reasons regarding the development of partnerships are discussed in more detail in Chapter V.

Three focus groups were held with family members. Only three of the nine family members who committed to attending came to the first focus group. To encourage participation, it was determined that a cash incentive might be helpful. The participants who had committed to attending the second focus group were all contacted and told that they would be paid $20 each to participate and that pizza would be served. Of the seven family members who had committed to attending the session, four showed up. During recruitment of the first two family focus groups, several potential members mentioned that it would be more convenient if the meeting took place in Lake. To encourage participation the third family focus group was held at the Lake Community Library and the participants were given a $20 incentive to attend. At the third family focus group nine of the eleven family members who had committed to attending the meeting came.

Family member demographics and background. The Family Member Focus Group Questionnaire was filled out by the family members at the focus group meetings. It was designed to provide background information regarding the family member and provide information regarding the community activities that the middle level child of the family member participated in. Of the 15 family members participating in the focus group, 11 (73.3%) were female and 4 (26.6%) were male.

Table 4 shows the family income level participants. The estimated median income for the community of Lake for 1996 is $46,396. Because of the range of income levels given on the questionnaire (45,001-75,000), it cannot be determined exactly how close the participants are to the median income for Lake. However, it appears that the median income level of the participants is at or slightly above the median for the community and above the $40,700 median income of the state.

Table 5 shows the educational attainment of the participants compared to the educational attainment of the residents of Lake.

Table 4

Family Income Level of the Family Focus Group Participants

$15,001-25,000	$25,001-45,000	$45,001-75,000	$75,001-100,000	$100,001+
6% (1)	20% (3)	53.3% (8)	13.3% (2)	6% (1)

(N = 15)
The number of family members responding in each category are in parentheses.

Table 5

Educational Attainment of Family Focus Group Participants Compared to Educational Attainment of Residents of Lake

	High School/ GED	Some College/ Tech School	College Graduate	Master's Degree
Family Member	20% (3)	40% (5)	26.6% (4)	13.3% (2)
Residents of Lake	21%	40%	22%	(Graduate or Professional Degree) 8%

(N = 15)

The educational attainment of the family focus group participants is higher than the norm for the Lake Community. This may reflect the self-selection of the participants. Those agreeing to participate in an educational study may value education more, as reflected by their own educational attainment, than those who did not agree to participate.

Table 6 shows the ethnicity of the family focus group members.

Table 6

Race of Family Focus Group Participants, the Community of Lake, and the River Middle School Students: 1996-1997 School Year

	African American	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic	White
% of focus group members (number)	6% (1)	6% (1)		86.66% (13)
% of Lake Community	1.2%	5.7%	2.9%	91.1%
% of school population 1996-1997 (number)	1.37% (12)	6.17% (54)	6.41% (56)	85.70% (749)

(*N* = 15)

The percentage of family focus group members in each racial category reflects a relatively equal representation when compared to the percentage of the school population with the notable exception of representation by Hispanics. Two of the families that declined to participate because they did not speak English spoke Spanish. The other two families that declined to participate for language reasons spoke Vietnamese. One family member focus group participant spoke Estonian as her native language.

Family members' prior experience with adolescents. Ten of the family members have children who are in high school, college, or adults who are over the age of 18 and not in school. Thus, 66.6% of the families have had prior experience with early adolescents and middle schools. Two

(20%) of the family members with children high school age or older have had children drop out of school. Those children have not returned to school or obtained a GED. The question regarding children who have dropped out of school was asked to give a snapshot of family members' life experiences with their children.

Family members as community members. To determine the amount of involvement of family members as community volunteers, two questions were asked on the focus group questionnaire. The first question referred to how often the family member volunteered in community programs. The second asked how often the family members volunteered at the middle school. The responses are summarized in Table 7. There appears to be little participation by family members as volunteers in community programs, but more participation at the middle school.

Table 7

Family Member's Frequency of Involvement as a Volunteer in Community Programs and at the Middle School During the 1996-1997 School Year

	One or two times a week	One or two times a month	One or two times a grading period	One or two times a year	Never
Volunteered in community programs with middle school children (4-H, Church, etc.)	(2) 13.3%	(0)	(2) 13.3%	(3) 20%	(8) 53.3%
Volunteered at the middle school	(2) 13.3%	(2) 13.3%	(2) 13.3%	(4) 26.6%	(5) 33.3%

(N = 15)

Another dimension of family members as community members can be seen through the participation of their children in community-sponsored activities. Family members were asked to list the community activities that their child participated in during the 1996-1997 school year. Eight family members indicated that their child participated in several activities. Two family members did not answer the question and one family member indicated that their child was not involved in any community activities. The community activities the family members' children participated in included baseball, basketball, football, karate, roller hockey, soccer, swimming, church youth groups, 4-H, Girl Scouts, and Boy Scouts. While family members are not extensively involved as community volunteers they do provide the opportunity for their children to participate in community activities.

Family members as teachers. As Weston (1989) stated, "Parents are a child's first teachers; and families are their first, and most enduring, school" (p. 2). To obtain a snapshot of family members as teachers, the family members were asked approximately how much time they spent helping their child with homework. The responses on the focus group questionnaire indicate that there is a wide range from less than one hour per week to more than six hours per week. The responses are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8

Approximately How Much Time Family Members Spend Helping Their Child with Homework Each Week

Less than 1 hour a week	1-2 hours a week	3-4 hours a week	4-5 hours a week	5-6 hours a week	More than 6 hours a week
(3) 20%	(6) 40%	(1) 6.6%	(2) 13.3%	(1) 6.6%	(2) 13.3 %

(N = 15)

The ability and maturity of the student may influence the amount of time a family member spends assisting with homework. Dauber and Epstein (1993) found that families who rated their middle school children as poor students did not spend as much time assisting with homework as parents of average students. High achieving students may not need or want assistance with homework.

Teacher Recruitment and Background Information

Specific information regarding recruitment and background of the teachers who participated in the teacher focus groups is presented in this section. It is presented in five parts: (a) teacher recruitment, (b) demographic information, (c) teachers as family members, (d) teachers as community members, and (e) professional experience.

The "Teacher Focus Group Questionnaire" (located in Appendix B) was filled out by the teachers at the focus group meetings. The questionnaire was designed to provide background information regarding the teacher's experience as a teacher and provide information regarding the teacher's life experience as a family member. As Moles (1993) and Lightfoot (1978) pointed out, teachers are often parents, may be single parents, and face the same difficulties in life as their students' families and community members.

Teacher recruitment. At a faculty meeting in the spring of 1997, the principal of River Middle School announced that this study would take place. She requested that any teachers that did not want to be contacted to participate in the study let her know and their phone numbers would not be released to me. Eleven of 55 teachers requested that they not be contacted. The remaining 44 teachers were listed in alphabetical order and systematic sampling with a random start was used to select participants to be contacted. Eighteen teachers were invited to participate in the two teacher focus groups. Six of the teachers contacted chose not to participate for various reasons including: (a) four teachers had other obligations at the time of the meetings (taking children to sports practice, previous social obligations, being out of town on vacation), (b) one teacher did not know if she would be returning to River Middle School and did not wish to participate, and (c) one teacher did not think participating in the research would be of any benefit to him. A total of 12 teachers participated in the study.

Teacher demographics. The 12 teachers participating in the focus groups are all white, all spoke English as their native language, and were evenly divided by gender (50% were female and 50% were male). The age distribution was 25% between the ages of 19-29, 25% between the ages of 30-39, 16.6% between the ages of 40-49 and 33.3% between the ages of 50-59.

Teachers as family members. Responses on the questionnaire reveal that 10 of the teachers have children. Three (25%) have one child, five (41.66%) have two children, one (8.33%) has three children, and one (8.33%) has four children. Three teachers have children who are pre-kindergarten age and one has a child in elementary school. Two of the teachers have children in high school, two have children in college, and three have children who are over the age of 18 and not in school. Thus, seven (58.33%) of the teachers have experience as family members with middle level children.

Two of the teachers have children who have dropped out of school. This represents 28.57% of the teachers who have children in high school or older. One teacher has two children who dropped out of school; one in grade 10 and another in grade 12. The other teacher has a child who dropped out in grade 11. Of these three children, two have returned to school or obtained a General Equivalency Degree (GED). One has not returned to school or obtained a GED. The question regarding children who drop out of school was asked to give a snapshot of teachers' life experiences with their own children.

Teachers as community members. Table 9 shows the frequency of teacher involvement in volunteer programs working with middle school children.

Table 9

Teachers' Frequency of Involvement as a Community Member During the 1996-1997 School Year

	One or two times a week	One or two times a month	One or two times a grading period	One or two times a year	Never
Volunteered in community programs with middle school children (4-H, Church, etc.)	(2) 16.6%	(0)	(1) 8.3%	(4) 33.3%	(5) 41.6%

(N = 12)

The information regarding teacher participation in the community as a volunteer is limited to interactions with middle level students in community programs. It does not include interactions the teachers have on their own time with their students. For example, it would not include taking students to see cadavers and engage in hands-on science projects that one teacher does before school hours on his own time. Thus, it may not present a complete picture of the teachers as community members. Several of the teachers are involved with working with children of other ages, and in other community programs such as Solve Oregon Litter and Vandalism that are beyond the scope of this study.

Professional experience. The educational level of the teachers exceeded the minimum necessary to earn a teaching license in Ocean. Two (16.6%) have 50 credit hours beyond the master's degree, five (41.6%) have earned a master's degree, and five (41.6%) have earned 30 credit hours beyond their bachelor's degree.

The mean number of years of total teaching experience was 13.72 years. The range of total teaching experience was from a minimum of one year to a maximum of 33 years of experience. The mean number of years of teaching experience at the middle level was 12.27 years. The range of teaching experience at the middle level was from a minimum of one year to a maximum of 33 years of experience. Included in the middle level mean are two teachers who taught at the ninth grade level at River when it was a junior high school.

Two of the teachers have experience teaching in elementary schools and one has experience teaching in a high school. Four of the teachers (33.3%) have an elementary license and eight (66.6%) have a secondary license. None of the teachers with an elementary license have additional, special area endorsements in addition to their K-9 license.

The endorsement areas of the secondary teachers include Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies, Coaching, Speech, Drama, French, Life Science, Handicapped Learner, and Home Economics. Five of the teachers with secondary licenses have endorsements in more than one content area. Two of the teachers have endorsements in both Social Studies and Language Arts, one has endorsements in both Social Studies and Coaching, one has endorsement in both Language Arts and Reading, and one has endorsements in English, Speech, Drama, and French.

Several of the teachers had special assignments that were either a part of their teaching load, on an extra duty contract, or that they did as volunteers outside of school hours. An examination of the River Middle School Profile, 1996-1997, and an examination of the focus group transcripts reveals that the special assignments included coordinator for the school Talented and Gifted Program, teaching Leadership classes, teaching computer classes, teaching a class on teen living, advising the student council, leading and advising the after school service club, and coaching in after school sports programs. Four of the teachers (33.3%) participated in service learning projects involving community partnerships. Six of the teachers (50%) engaged in professional development activities that were paid for by the school. Two of the teachers in the focus groups mentioned activities that they engaged in to extend the curriculum and provide their students with enrichment experiences beyond the classroom. One teacher arranged a student exchange project with a rural/remote Oregon school and another arranged a visit to a nearby university so the students could see cadavers and engage in science projects.

Community Member Recruitment and Background Information

Specific information regarding recruitment and background information regarding the community members who participated in the focus groups is presented in this section. It is presented in five parts: (a) community member recruitment, (b) community member demographics and background (c) community member experience with adolescents, (d) community members as family members, and (e) community members as teachers.

Community member recruitment.

Names of community members who are involved with middle school students were obtained from multiple sources. The principal of River Middle School provided a list of community sports organizations that used the school. I contacted well-known organizations such as 4-H and the Boy Scouts to obtain names of group leaders. The Lake Police Department was contacted,and the I met with the Commanding Officer to explain the study and obtain permission for the officer who works with middle school students to participate in the study. The River Middle School secretary, who lives in the community, provided me with the names of two large churches that have active middle level youth programs. The teachers at the first teacher focus group meeting and the family members at the first family focus group meeting were asked to suggest names. The teachers provided names of individuals who had helped with service learning projects including the name of the director of the Wet County Wetlands Project and the Community Relations Directory of the Lake Retirement Center. The family members suggested names of community members who taught swimming and dance, as well as the coaches of community sports programs.

From these multiple sources a total of 15 names of individuals who work with middle level students in Lake was generated. Because of the small size of the pool everyone on the list was phoned and invited to participate in the community focus group. To encourage participation the community members were offered a cash incentive of $20 and were told pizza would be served. A total of eight community members agreed to participate in the focus group. This represents 53.3% of those phoned. Of the eight community members who agreed to attend the focus group meeting six (75%) attended. The two community members who could not come to the meeting both contacted me the day of the meeting. One was called out of town on an emergency, and the other was unable to find someone to take his place at the scout meeting held on the evening of the focus group. The community member who was called out of town wrote me a letter sharing his views on family, community and teacher relationships. He is involved with middle level children as a Boy Scout Leader, church group leader and soccer coach. Because those groups were represented in the focus group, and because his views were expressed by members of the focus group, his comments were not used in this study.

The seven community members who declined to take part in the study gave various reasons for not wishing to participate. Two who declined were not interested in the study. The remaining five were interested in the study but were already committed to youth activities at the time the research was conducted.

Community member demographics and background. The six community members participating in this study filled out the "Community Member Focus Group Questionnaire" at the focus group meeting. Two of the participants are female and four are male. All of the participants identified themselves as white. Table 10 shows the income level of the community member participants and family member participants.

It is interesting to note that the range of income for family members and community members is the same--from between $15,001-25,000 to more than $100,001. However, a far larger percentage (66.6%) of community members earn less than $45,000 per year than family members (26.6%). This may be because two of the community focus group members are relatively young, between 21 and 22 years of age. They are not established in careers and have not finished college. The educational attainment of community focus group participants compared to family focus group participants is shown in Table 11.

Table 10

Income Level of Community Focus Group Participants
and Family Member Focus Group Participants

	$15,001-25,000	$25,001-45,000	$45,001-75,000	$75,001-100,000	$100,001+
Community Members	33.3% (2)	33.3% (2)	16.6% (1)	0	16.6% (1)
Family Members	6% (1)	20% (3)	53.3% (8)	13.3% (2)	6% (1)

The number of participants responding in each category is shown in parentheses. (Community Members *N* = 6; Family Members *N* = 15)

Table 11

Educational Attainment of Community Focus
Group Participants Compared to Family
Focus Group Participants

	High School/GED	Some Col/ Tech School	College Graduate	Master's Degree	Doctorate Degree
Community Members	0	66.6% (4)	16.6% (1)	0	16.6% (1)
Family Members	20% (3)	40% (6)	26.6% (4)	13.3% (2)	0

(Community Focus Group Participants: *N* = 6)
(Family Focus Group Participants: *N* = 15)

All of the community members have some college or technical school experience. In the family focus groups 39.9% of the participants have a college degree or higher. In the community focus groups 33.2% of the participants have a college degree or higher. Two of the community member focus group participants are in school part time.

Community member experience with adolescents. Five of the community members have a total of 26 years of experience working with children in grades 6 through 8. One participant did not answer the question on the questionnaire. The range is from 3 to 7 years. This represents of mean of 5.2 years of experience. The participants represented a wide spectrum of community organizations and types of involvement with middle level children. Included were community members who worked with middle level children through service learning projects, public safety, church youth groups, Boy Scouts, Soccer, youth camp director, and as 4-H leaders. Some of the participants worked with middle level children in multiple roles. One of the participants is both a 4-H leader and a youth camp director; one is both a church youth group leader and a 4-H leader; and one is both a Boy Scout leader and a 4-H leader.

Community members as family members. Four of the community members have children. Two have two children, one has three children, and one has six children. One has a child who is currently in middle school. The remaining three community members have children who are in high school, college, or adults who are over the age of 18 and not in school. Thus, 66.6% of the community members have experience as family members of early adolescents and with children in middle schools. None of the community members have children who have dropped out of school.

Community members as teachers. The community members act as teachers in both formal and informal settings. One of the participants works in partnership with River Middle School to provide service learning experiences directly tied to the school curriculum. Others act as teachers by providing instruction through church groups, scouting. 4-H and sports. Through these activities they teach both a formal curriculum and socialization skills.

Data Analysis

Sources of Data

To provide information regarding the setting of River Middle School, the City of Lake, and background information regarding River Middle School and the student population, data from several sources were utilized. These sources included the River Middle School community study (Gerber, Heyer, McCutcheon, Walker, & Wolfe, 1996), school documents, school and community archival records, and field notes generated during recruitment of focus group participants and my visits to the community. School documents and archival records examined included the River Middle School 1996-1997 school profile, the 1996-1997 River Middle School Student Handbook, school reports, and newsletters sent to families, and the Lake Database 1996 prepared by the Lake Planning Division. Six focus group meetings were held to provide information regarding the perceptions of family members, middle level teachers, and community members regarding partnerships at the middle level.

Focus Group Data Analysis

The topics in the moderator focus group guide were used to provide a structure for the analysis of the data. The analysis of data followed the methods suggested by Krueger (1994), Miles and Huberman (1994), Morgan (1988), and Patton (1987). A content analysis was done to analyze the focus group data. Transcripts of the audio tape (supported by the videotape when necessary to identify who is speaking) and field notes were used to identify themes, important examples, and patterns in the data (Patton, 1987). The audio tape and videotape were used when necessary to supplement the transcript analysis. Categories were developed and emerging themes tracked.

The Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty Ltd (QSR NUD.IST 4, 1997) (Nonnumerical, Unstructured Data, Indexing, Searching, and Theorizing) computer software was examined to aid in the coding process and to facilitate analysis. QSR NUD.IST 4 is designed to be used in qualitative analysis "by supporting process coding data in an Index System, Searching text or searching patterns of coding and Theorizing about the data" (QSR NUD.IST 4, 1997, p. 2). The program is designed to help the researcher to search for patterns in coding and build new codes, clarify ideas, discover themes and construct and test theories about the data. I found that using the NUD.IST program made me feel remote from the data. Thus, I stopped using the program and used other means to analyze the data.

Using the numbering function of Microsoft Word I numbered all of the statements and then cut them into statements by each person and physically formed piles of statements classified by emerging themes. The numbering of the statements enabled me to use the "find" command of the word processing program to easily return to the original statement in the transcript and consider the context the statement was made in.

As suggested by Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) I moved "backwards" and "forwards" between the data and the emerging themes, developing coding categories, building on items and information, making connections among items, and proposing new categories. Information from the pre-focus group questionnaires was used to determine if patterns emerged based on demographics and/or degree or type of involvement in schools and/or community.

The Study's Limitations

This study is not designed to develop generalizations regarding the perceptions of family members, middle level teachers, or community members. It is meant to develop an understanding of particular family members', middle level teachers, and community members' experiences of partnerships and perceptions of partnerships. The range of their perspectives is limited by several factors. This study's limitations include the self-selection of the participants, the lack of the perspective of low income participants, the lack of the perspective of members of the Hispanic population, and the difficulty in recruiting community members to participate. Therefore, the study does not represent the range of the school population.

Participation in this study was on a voluntary basis. The voices of those who have no interest and/or do not value partnerships were not heard. Those family members, teachers, and community members who declined to participate may not have deemed the subject of significant importance to participate, did not have time to participate, or some family members may have chosen not to participate because of language and/or cultural barriers.

Of the family members and community members participating, two indicated that they earned more than $100,000 per year. This was the highest income category indicated on the focus group questionnaire. None of the participants indicated they were in the lowest income category of less than $15,000 per year. In this sample low income populations are under represented.

Although the Asian population is represented in proportion to the Asian students at River Middle School, the Hispanic population is not. Hispanic students make up 6.41% of the River Middle School population. Of the 188 family members randomly selected from the River Middle School Directory 12 (6.38%) had apparently Hispanic names. Two family members with Hispanic names agreed to come to a focus group but did not attend. Two of the Hispanic families contacted did not speak English. I offered to provide a translator to overcome the language barrier, but they still declined to participate. Two of the Hispanic families' phones were disconnected. The remainder declined to participate because they were not interested or were busy. Thus, there were no Hispanic participants in any of the focus group sessions.

Language was also a barrier to the recruitment of family members of Vietnamese heritage. The first

Vietnamese family contacted said they did not speak English well enough to participate. A follow-up phone call was made by a translator who invited them to participate using the Vietnamese language and offering to translate at the meeting. The family member still declined to participate. The second Vietnamese family contacted also said they could not speak English well enough to participate. When I mentioned to the family member that her English was excellent and easy to understand, the family member indicated that she just did not think she could "do such a thing."

Cultural perceptions of what the family role should be in regarding involvement in their children's education may have contributed to both Hispanic and Vietnamese family members declining to participate in this study. As pointed out in the literature review, many families, especially recent immigrant families with Hispanic and Southeast Asian cultures, may view involvement in their children's education as interference with the school (Moles, 1993; Yap & Enoki, 1995).

Another limitation to this study is the relatively small number of community members who participated. I was only able to generate a list of 15 community members to contact. Twelve of the 15 were very interested in participating in the study. Five of the community members who declined to participate were already committed to youth activities or had other obligations at the time the research was conducted. Recall however, that the community members who did participate represented a wide range of roles and organizations.

The results of the focus group discussions are not presented as generalizable; that is, they do not represent a broad base of perspectives. However, the results do contribute to the knowledge base regarding the perceptions of selected family members, teachers, and community members relative to what they perceive their roles to be currently, and what they perceive their roles should be, in working with each other to benefit middle level students.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS OF FAMILY MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF WORKING WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND TEACHERS TO BENEFIT MIDDLE LEVEL CHILDREN

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of family members, community members, and teachers regarding their current role working together to benefit middle level students, and of what their roles should be. This chapter presents findings based on data derived from focus groups, which were audio and videotaped; field notes generated during recruitment of participants, during visits to the community and school, as well as after each focus group session; a researcher-prepared questionnaire; and school documents and archival records.

As pointed out in the literature review and in Chapter III, family members, teachers, and community members play multiple roles. Occasionally, comments made by focus group participants speaking in one category-of-membership focus group are used in another category-of-membership group when it is clear they are speaking in another role. For example, comments made by community members when speaking as family members are included in family member perceptions.

Much of the focus group discussions involve the concept of relationships. Recall that for the purpose of this study, "relationship" describes the interactions between two or more people or groups who have an association that continues over a period of time. According to Vander Zanden (1996), "When an association continues long enough for two people to become linked together by a relatively stable set of expectations, it is called a relationship" (p. 101).

The family members' perspectives as findings are presented in this chapter. The perceptions of family members are presented first, because they have the closest, long-term relationship with the child. Given that much of the research on partnerships has focused on the perspective of educators, I have made an attempt to give equal standing to the views of family members, community members, and teachers. Family member and community member perspectives are also presented first to avoid overemphasizing the educator's perspective. Perspectives of community members are presented in Chapter V and teachers' perceptions in Chapter VI.

The next four sections of this chapter present family members' perceptions regarding working with community members and teachers organized using four topics from the focus group guide: (a) relationships among the groups, (b) responsibilities in the relationships, (c) obstacles to the development of partnerships, and (d) facilitation of partnerships.

Family Members' Perceptions of Relationships with Community Members and Teachers

The findings regarding family members' perceptions of relationships with community members and teachers are presented in three parts: (a) history of family member interactions with community members and teachers, (b) family members' perceptions of relationships with community members, and (c) family members' perceptions of relationships with teachers.

History of Interactions

Responses on the focus group questionnaire indicate that 73.3% of the families have children who participate in community-sponsored activities one or more times a week. Only two family members have children who never participate in community-sponsored activities. Table 12 shows family members' participation in volunteer community programs and their children's involvement as participants in community-sponsored activities.

Table 12

Family Members' Involvement in Volunteer Community Programs and Their Children's Involvement as Participants in Community-Sponsored Activities During the 1996-1997 School Year

Family Members	One or two times a week	One or two times a month	One or two times a grading period	One or two times a year	Never
Volunteered in community programs with middle school children (4-H, church, etc.)	F2, F15 (2) 13.3%	(0)	(2) 13.3%	(3) 20%	(8) 53.3%
How often did your child participate in community-sponsored activities (4-H, scouting, sports, church, etc.)	F2, F15 (11) 73.3%	(0)	(1) 6.6%	(1) 6.6%	(2) 13.3%

(N = 15)

F2 and F15 are the most actively involved family members. They volunteer weekly in community programs and their children participate one or more times a week in community-sponsored activities. The majority of the family members indicated on the questionnaire that they never volunteer in community programs.

Interactions reported between family members and teachers indicate that all of the family members had interactions with at least one of their child's middle level teachers. Table 13 shows the number of teachers with whom the family members had met or talked to about their child during the 1996-1997 school year. More than half (53.3%) of the family members had interactions with all of their child's teachers. Ten of the family members had children who had completed middle school. Thus, 10 of the family members have had an association with middle school teachers as a group for a minimum of three years. This is a sufficient period of time for family members to establish expectations of middle level teachers, both as individual teachers and teachers as a group.

Table 13

Family Members' Interactions with the Teachers of Their Middle Level Children: The Number of Teachers the Family Members Met or Talked to About Their Child During the 1996-1997 School Year

None	One	Two to Four	More Than Four But Not All	All
0	(1) 6%	(4) 26.6%	(2) 13.3%	(8) 53.3%

N = (15)

How the family members perceive the quality of their relationship with the teachers is shown on Table 14. The majority of the family members (86.6%) believe that the relationships with teachers are good or very good. The remainder think of the relationship as neither good nor bad.

Table 14

Family Members' Perceptions of Relations with Their Middle School Child's Teachers

Very Good	Good	Neither Good Nor Bad	Bad	Very Bad
(7) 46.6%	(6) 40%	(2) 13.3%	0	0

N = (15)

Family Members' Relationships with Community Members

While family members think they have good relationships with both community members and middle school teachers, they also tend to report easier and more relaxed relationships with community members than teachers. For instance, they indicate that it is easier to communicate with community members than with teachers. Still, some family members see their relationships with community members as too intense or serious, especially in dealing with coaches. The quality of these "good" relationships between family members and community members appears to be shaped by social ties and types of activities in which children are involved.

In describing his relationship with community members, F4[3] mentions that:

> My son is in Scouts, so I am friends with three of the Scout leaders. My wife is the Girl Scout leader, so she is definitely involved in that. And then I have always had a fairly good relationship with the basketball coach that my son had . . . yeah, they have always been pretty good . . . The difference [between relationships

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[3] Pseudonyms are assigned to all participants in the study using letter and number combinations. The letter identifies the focus group category followed by a number indicating the specific participant. Specifically F denotes family, C refers to community members and T identifies teachers. The participants are numbered consecutively across the focus groups. For example, T1 was the first speaker in the first teacher focus group session. T7 was the first speaker in the second teacher focus group session.

> with community members and teachers] is that you see them once a week. You not only see [the community member] once a week, but often families get together once a month or once every two or three months. It is just more frequent. (F4, 261 & 271 FFG#2)[4]

F4 indicates that his relationships with some community members are characterized by close personal ties.

In terms of the quality of relationship, F15 perceives relationships with community members as more relaxed than relationships with teachers.

> It is much more relaxed. There is no emphasis on grades. So it is much looser and because it is that way I think it is more relaxed and you probably communicate more in some ways. (F15, 488 FFG#3)

Ease of communication was also mentioned by F8. For her, ease of communication also involved not having to be a direct participant to know what was going on.

> Well, with sports it is easy to go watch. You can sit in the bleacher and watch what is going on. You don't have to be a direct participant but you can see what your kid does. You are unobtrusive and you can say, "Thank you," to the

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[4] At the conclusion of each quotation the speaker is identified by pseudonym followed by a number indicating the transcript paragraph. Paragraphs are numbered consecutively across each category-of-membership focus group. For example the family member focus group transcript starts with 1, the first paragraph of the first family focus group and ends with 696 the last paragraph of the third family focus group. The number of the focus group session in which the individual participated is listed last. For example, FFG#3 indicates the third family member focus group session. There was only one community member focus group session; thus, community member statements are identified by the pseudonym and paragraph number.

> coach and go on your way. So I think that it is easier to communicate [with community members than teachers]. (F8, 494 FFG#2)

Some family members feel that there is better communication with community members than teachers because there are fewer children involved and because it is easy to go and observe sports without having to be actively involved. However, the relationship can be intense, particularly with coaches. F7 sees the intensity displayed by both family members and coaches.

> I have seen other situations where even at that level some of the coaches can get pretty intense and some of the parents can get even more intense . . . things get out of hand, a little too serious. (F7, 264 FFG#2)

Family Members' Relationships with Teachers

Like their relationship with community members, the majority of the family members perceive their relationships with teachers are good to very good. However, family members also believe increased interactions and improved communication between teachers and family members would promote better relationships. Factors mentioned by family members that influence interactions and communication with teachers include the frequency and types of conferences and the organizational structure of the grade level of the child.

A content analysis of the family focus group transcripts reveals that terms such as "good," "positive," "wonderful," "fantastic," and "impressive" were used 12 times in the discussion to describe the current relationships. The perception of good relationships with the teachers appears to be true even for those family members who have children that face challenges at the middle level.

In discussing the general perceptions of the relationship between family members and teachers, F2 felt that her child's needs were met, even though she had a stressful experience with poor communications. F2 mentioned that she felt her child, who has special needs, "fell through the cracks." Meetings were held in the spring to make special arrangements with teachers the child would have in the fall. F2 believed that all of the arrangements were made and did not realize until about six weeks into the school year that there had been a communication breakdown.

> About six weeks into the school year we realized that the teachers didn't realize that she was on special studies and they didn't understand where this child was coming from. Their frustration levels were really high. I thought that was pretty serious, it gave me a feeling of real mistrust in what I was feeling about the school and the teachers. I was on the Site Council so I was also in a position where I could sit and on a weekly basis and really hear the hearts of these teachers and the administration, and it helped. But we felt that she fell through the

> cracks. But once everyone was informed I felt that they were accessible and willing to meet our needs, more than willing to meet our needs . . . That was my personal experience this year. But I see an eagerness and desire to help. (F2, 24 FFG#1)

Despite the difficult experience she had, F2 expressed an empathy for the teachers and administration based on her experience as a Site Council member. In addition to being a Site Council member, F2 volunteers at the middle school one or more times a week, and therefore has experience both as a decision maker and as an active participant at the school.

When asked, "Is there anything that you can think of that you would like to see changed in your relationship?," family members in all three family focus groups responded that increased communications would promote better relationships with teachers. Issues dealing with communications also emerged as major themes in the focus group meetings with community members and teachers.

Family members expressed a desire for more frequent communications with teachers. Both family members who volunteered in the school weekly, F2 and F15, and those who did not volunteer, F4, F8, and F10, felt that increased communication would improve the relationship.

> Some better communication mechanism would have been a great facilitator, just to get more information back-and-forth and to establish some kind of . . . I don't know . . . more of a relationship. (F4, 210 FFG#2)

The need for increased communication from the teachers is an issue for F10, who does not volunteer at the middle school. She points out that families need more than a progress report in between grading periods.

> I think the point that you get the progress report is almost too late if your child is having problems . . . I think they need to contact us a couple of weeks, maybe four weeks, into the grading period . . . not when it is almost over, and then all of a sudden "Oops!" they are not doing well. (F10, 411 FFG#3)

Family members expressed that communication was more frequent with the sixth grade teachers than with seventh and eighth grade teachers. In the third family focus group meeting, the following exchange took place:

> My son with his sixth grade teacher last year set up a program that worked truly well. Once a week they brought home a paper at the end of the week . . . what homework was missing, what had to be done, what projects were coming up . . . so we could plot our time out so my son would have the time to do them. That was a big plus. She had contact with us once a week, whether or not I came in to see her, which I did anyway, but for parents who weren't able to come in they knew what was going on . . . on a weekly basis with their child. Which I found very helpful. (F15, 412 FFG#3)
>
> I still think they need that. (F9, 413 FFG#3)
>
> That goes away in the seventh or eighth grade though. I agree. My sixth grader and I think it is wonderful, it is great . . . you can see where they are at on a week-to-week basis and you can help out. In the seventh and eighth grade . . . (F11, 414 FFG#3)
>
> But why does it have to go away? Why can't each teacher have a sheet. Why can't there be some

> type of system set up so that you can have some kind of contact each week? (F15, 415 FFG#3)

Family members felt that increased communication especially at the seventh and eighth grade levels would improve the relationship.

Family Members' Perceptions Regarding Responsibilities in Relationships Between Family Members/Community Members and Family Members/Teachers

To elicit family members' perceptions of responsibilities in the relationship with community members and teachers two questions were asked: (a) From your perspective, what do you think your responsibilities are, if any, in working with the community members and teachers--what is your "job" in the relationship?, and (b) What are the responsibilities of the community members and teachers in working with you? The findings are presented in four sections: (a) family members' perceptions of their responsibilities in relationships with community members, (b) family members' perceptions of the community members' responsibilities in the relationships, (c) family members' perceptions of their responsibilities in relationships with teachers, and (d) family members' perceptions of teachers' responsibilities in relationships.

Family Members' Views of Their Responsibilities in Relationships with Community Members

Family members see it as their responsibility to be involved and spend time so that a relationship can develop with community members and also to see what is happening socially with their child. F3 feels it is the family member's responsibility to be actively involved in developing a relationship with community members.

> I really do believe that the key is for the parents to develop the relationship and really put themselves out there . . . It is like you get out what you are willing to put out--involvement, opening up to these people who are really important forces in our kids' lives. There is really a payoff to doing this. (F3, 61 FFG#1)

Family members also indicated that the family needs to be involved to watch what is happening socially to the child. F2, who volunteers weekly, stated that

> It is the parents' responsibility to be there and watch what is happening socially . . . to watch what is happening during practices, during the games, how your child is relating. (F2, 68 FFG#1)

Family Members' Views of Community Members' Responsibilities in the Relationships

Two themes emerged in the discussion regarding the family members' perceptions of community members' responsibilities in relationships: (a) community member knowledge of the activity, and (b) community members' responsibility to keep families informed and try to get family members involved.

Some family members indicate that the level of ability is important and that community members have a responsibility to be knowledgeable about the activity. The following exchange between F8 and F9 points out this concern.

> My son had a basketball coach. The man volunteered to be the assistant coach, and the real coach--something happened to him--and suddenly he had to do it. His son was on the team, he had never coached a basketball team . . . you had to give him credit. He did a better job than I would have done, but he couldn't compete with the other teams. (F8, 512 FFG#3)
>
> Consequently, our boys didn't learn anything. (F9, 513 FFG#3)
>
> Yeah, it was tough. I had to give him credit for doing it though. (F8, 514 FFG#3)

The lack of ability by the coach was perceived by F8 as resulting in the children not being able to compete with other teams, even though F8 appeared to respect him for trying to coach the children. The comments regarding the need for knowledgeable volunteers reinforce the findings of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1995) that volunteers are often not trained to work with young adolescents.

However, being a positive role model was seen by F3 as being more important than the community member being knowledgeable about coaching.

> To be a good example. Specifically, any coaches that my sons' have had--they are such poor sports--they are not modeling well. The level of the coaching abilities are secondary to the level of how good a role model the person is. (F3, 146 FFG#1)

Communicating with family members is also seen as a responsibility of the community volunteer. F2 felt the responsibility of the community volunteer was to keep family members informed not only regarding practices and events but also regarding the child's social interactions.

> The day-to-day dealing with keeping us informed of the practices and events, but also what is happening socially with the child. I think that they could encourage the parents to be there to see what is happening socially. (F2, 68 FFG#1)

Family Members' Views of Their Responsibilities in Relationships with Teachers

Family members feel it is their primary responsibility to initiate contact with teachers to share information about issues in their child's life that may influence the child's performance or behavior at school. F3 and F2 both indicate that it is the family members' responsibility to initiate communication with teachers. F3 indicates it is a reciprocal relationship.

> I definitely think that it is a reciprocating relationship. I let the teachers know concerns

> and issues, my child's strengths, and maybe some of the things that are going on that are influencing my kid. You know, I lay this information out so that they can then feed me information back. And they can then take the information that I give them and use it to view my child as more than just a body sitting in class. If something is going on . . . if one of my kids is having some problems, and I can share those with the teachers, then there is more of an understanding . . . maybe why behavior is the way that it is in school, or maybe if something happens . . . maybe this is why his homework isn't done, or, you know, if this is an area that he is excelling in then that teacher can push him more in that direction. So, you know, I think that it . . . personally I don't think it is enough to just sit and wait until somebody calls me and says that there is a problem. I need to be feeding that information out there and showing that I have an interest in establishing this communication with teachers. (F3, 39 FFG#1)

> Our [the family members'] responsibility is to be chief communicator. We need to initiate it. That is one teacher trying to contact how many parents? So it really is our picture. (F2, 40 FFG#1)

Family members believe it is their responsibility to initiate communication, and also to make sure the teacher is aware of issues in the child's life. F6 mentioned that it is important for the family to make sure that the teachers are aware of things happening at home, "Like moves or changes in relationship or anything like that . . . as a way of clueing-in what the student is doing" (F6, 229 FFG#2). This was also seen as the family responsibility by F7, who stated:

> I think that it is parents' responsibility to keep teachers appraised of anything that is

> going on whether it is good or bad, something that might affect their [the child's] state-of-mind. (F7, 237 FFG#2)

Family Members' Views of Teachers' Responsibilities in Relationships

When asked what they perceived as the teachers' responsibility in the relationship, family members indicated that: (a) teachers should be available to meet with family members and the child, and (b) teachers should keep families informed about what is happening at school with their child.

Family members indicate that it is the teacher's responsibility to be available to communicate with family members and children. F11, who volunteers one or two times a term at the middle school, expressed frustration with the lack of teacher availability to help her child in math. She stated that she asked the teacher how her child could receive extra time, and said that the teacher

> never gave us an opportunity for him to go in and meet with him. It was as if he didn't care. And I think that it is a responsibility for a teacher to have themselves available at some point in time--before, during, after, whatever--when a child can go in one-one-one. If they don't get something, a child is not going to go up in front of a class and go, "Duh, I don't get this!" . . . I think that is a big responsibility of a teacher. (F11, 436 FFG#3)

Perhaps because of a breakdown in communications between the family member and the teacher, or perhaps because the family member was uninformed about other opportunities for children to receive assistance, F11 was dissatisfied with the teacher.

Two other family members in the same focus group session expressed a desire for time to meet with teachers. F10, who does not volunteer at the middle school, expressed a desire for "just some regular time that you can see the teacher" (F10, 460 FFG#3). F14, who volunteers once or twice a term, suggested that it would be helpful if teachers ". . . could put one day aside even, a specific hour or something and then just say, 'Come in'" (F14, 437 FFG#3). F9, who volunteers at the middle school one or two times a month, has a different perception of teacher availability. She stated, "Teachers are pretty good at trying to get together with you. They really are. They seem to like it when the parents take concern" (F9, 428 FFG#3).

F2, who volunteers weekly at school, pointed out that:

> I know that any morning if you call at 8:00 in the morning you will get a teacher on the line . . . It is also happening a couple of periods sometime during the day--for about an hour--the teachers are available. Hopefully they would like to get some work done, but they are accessible to parents at that time. So I know that there is plenty of time during the day that I can go over there. (F2, 49 FFG#1)

Family members' perception that it is their responsibility to initiate communication with the teacher was discussed previously. However, they also believe that the teachers are responsible for communication with them regarding more than just grades. F13 believes it is the teacher's responsibility to keep families informed, including information about the "good things."

> Often if you have a child that is doing fine, you only hear that at conference time. It is kind of nice, and it is nice for the child to be told, "Hey, you are doing really good." (F13, 431 FFG#3)

The suggestion that it is the teacher's responsibility to see the child as an individual was made by F15. She mentioned that the children of family members who do not have an opportunity to participate at school, can fall through the cracks and get lost unless the teacher views the children as individuals with particular needs.

> I guess I would also like to see the teacher see my child not just as a student but as an individual, you know, with particular needs. [Teachers]should take the time to find out if they are having a particular bad day, or even a good day, and spend a little one-on-one time with them . . . Unless the child asserts himself or herself with the teacher, unless the parent does that already so the teacher is kind of looking out for your child because you have already made your views known in the school system--that child can fall through the cracks and get lost. It is not fair to the parent who is working so much that he doesn't get a chance to participate in the school system. (F15, 441 FFG#3)

This family member volunteers several times a week at school and is a member of the Site Council. As a result, she feels that the teachers know her views and what she wants for her children. She believes that being active has worked well for her, but she also realizes that not all family members can be as active. F15 has four children, one is in middle school, and the others are in high school, are adults, or have dropped out of school.

Summary

Family members in this study see it as their responsibility to connect with both their children's teachers and community activities in which their children participate. Family members believe it is the responsibility of the family to be involved with their children's activities, and also that it is the responsibility of the community members leading the activity to communicate with family members.

Family members believe that communication is a responsibility of both the family and the teachers. The family members believe it is their responsibility to initiate communication and also to make sure the teacher is aware of issues in the child's life. They expect the teachers to uphold their responsibilities to family members by communicating and being available. Not surprisingly, family members who volunteer at the middle school more than once a month appear to be more aware of the availability of the teachers to meet than family members who never volunteer or who volunteer at the middle school less than once a month.

Family members also have expectations of community members to provide a safe and healthy environment for the children and to be a good role model. They also want the community member to be knowledgeable about the activity so it will be worthwhile for the child.

Family Members' Perceptions of Obstacles to the Development of Partnerships

In discussing relationships with community members, family members mentioned obstacles to the healthy development of children that are presented by society and value conflicts between themselves and community members. These obstacles are discussed in two sections to reflect the concerns of family members. The first section presents the findings of the family members' perceptions of obstacles presented by society and social problems within the community that are obstacles to the healthy development of their children. The second section presents the family members' perceptions regarding obstacles to the development of partnerships with local community members. This section concludes with the findings of family members' perceptions of obstacles to the development of partnerships with teachers.

Family Members' Views of Obstacles Presented by Society and Social Problems Within the Community

To family members, images offered by television, the Internet, and, societal changes present family members with value conflicts between themselves and the standards conveyed to their children. F3 expresses concern that violence on television has desensitized both adults and children. Her comments are followed by F2, who points out that family members are not aware of the explicit material and violence presented on the Internet.

> Well, there is so much violence on television that I think our kids have become desensitized. I think that we as adults have become desensitized to it. When it is there in front of you, it starts to become less of a horror and more normal, and our kids see this every day. And no matter how much we try to monitor what our kids watch--I am always telling my kids to turn that off, you know. But as they become older it becomes harder-and-harder to monitor that. (F3, 93 FFG#1)

> When you get kids that mentally are "natural born killers" and watching that over-and-over. You put this in the mind of a 6th, 7th, or 8th grader . . . boy, they are not developed to handle that. The Internet has more explicit stuff and violence than parents are aware of. They are in a high-tech world and we haven't gotten on board yet. And they know that, too. (F2, 94 FFG#1)

Family members also see that social problems within the community present challenges to their children. F2, who has two children who are now adults, refers to the changes in the middle school and society during the five years since her older children completed middle school. F3, who also has two older children, thinks that the environment for middle school children has changed.

> It is so dangerous out there for middle school kids. It is a different world . . . Coming back as a parent of middle school kids after five years I have spent a lot of time with administration saying how it has changed. It is just a dangerous world. In '93 we had our first gang meeting in [Lake]. "Gangs in [Lake]?" This is a waste of taxpayers' money. Within three years we have identifiable problems. This is filtering down to the grade school. We see serious issues--the drug issues. I have had . . . a businessman asked my son to buy drugs for him. We never had that five years ago--parents approaching the kids . . . This is happening at the middle school. They [middle level children] are harder. They are more worldly-wise. They are exposed to so much more. Fourteen-year-olds are on the street now . . . That didn't use to happen until they were juniors in high school. (F2, 88 FFG#1)

> I think that just the environment, too, is a lot more dangerous. I know that over the last couple of years there have been several incidents of kids just walking home from [River] and being accosted by men in cars. I know that my two sons and two of their friends were walking home early in the school year and were harassed by a whole group of kids, who then said that they were going to get a gun. And my kids were just petrified. (F3, 89 FFG#1)

> They do not take it as a threat. It is not just blowing smoke; this is a real threat to these kids. They may go home and get a gun. (F2, 90 FFG#1)

Family members F2 and F3 clearly see the influence of television, the Internet, and social issues within the community as being obstacles to the healthy development of their children.

In the first family focus group session the following exchange took place in which family members discussed ways to overcome the obstacles mentioned above.

> I think that there are more basic values that we could get back to, and we are seeing that. . . . Because of the issue with drugs, the issue with gangs standards are being raised [at school] because they have been violated--your backpacks must stay in your lockers, they can't wear hats, they can't wear clothes. A standard is being raised and I support that. I would hope that more parents would, instead of taking "you are violating my child's civil rights" or "their ability to express themselves" would get on board and say, "we really need to raise that standard and get back to some values that are placed on the community. This is not the way you are in the community." (F2, 101 FFG#1)
>
> And just don't shoot. (F1, 102 FFG#1)
>
> And just don't shoot. (F2, 103 FFG#1)
>
> I think that things that we can do as parents, though . . . we were talking about, you know, all this information and influences outside attacking our kids and just desensitizing them to all these things. I think that if we can be models for our children, if we can involve other adults in their lives that are good models for them. (F3, 104 FFG#1)
>
> I think, too, that it is important that we as parents respect the values and differences of others. Instead of us looking down our noses. . . . You know, respecting where they are coming from. "what is okay for your family is not okay for my family." (F2, 105 FFG#1)

Family Members' Views of Obstacles to the Development of Partnerships with Local Community Members

On the more local level, family members again experience value conflicts as obstacles to the development of partnerships with local community members. Family members also struggle with issues of time and emotional energy in attempting to create relationships.

Family members mentioned conflicting values between themselves and community members as they see different purposes for the child's participation in an activity. Family members want their children to have fun and a positive experience. They believe that the community members sometimes are on a "mission" and do not necessarily honor their family values. F5 mentioned that

> It is difficult for the parent. I have a sense that the coach is going to make a mean machine out of my kid, and I really don't want a mean machine for a kid. The person that is volunteering is on a mission. They need to honor the fact that I as a parent may not honor quite all of their strategies. I have different expectations for my children when they get back home. (F5, 287 FFG#2)

The standards of behavior that represent values exhibited by the community member are seen by F15 as being an obstacle in the relationship.

> My values might be different than the coach. Some of the coaches act like the boys when they are coaching the teams. They might swear a little bit more, kind of be a little bit more macho-mannish, which I don't approve of

> necessarily. So how do I convey that feeling to the coach, or do I say that I am going to agree with this so my son can have the experience. You have to have a certain amount of compatibility of values before you put your child into certain sports, or anything else that you are doing. (F15, 518 FFG#3)

The conflict of values is also seen as an obstacle to communication between family members and community members.

The amount of time and effort it takes for family members to support their children in activities is mentioned as an obstacle to family involvement by F3, F11, and F2. This includes not only supporting the children when they are involved in a program but also finding activities in the first place. As a result of budget cuts and the transition from a junior high School to a middle school, there has been a reduction in the extracurricular activities sponsored directly by the school. F3 stated that

> I think it is more work for the parents and the student to look to extracurricular activities to meet some of the needs that formally had been met by the school. (F3, 31 FFG#1)

The level of energy necessary for family members to maintain active involvement in their children's lives is perceived as sometimes being overwhelming. F3 stated later in the focus group session that

> It is a lot of work for a parent to maintain this level of involvement in every aspect of their kids' lives. You know, sometimes it would

> be so much easier just to send them out the door to practice and just say, "Oh! I've got an hour-and-a-half. I can just kick back." So maintaining that level just takes a lot more energy and effort on the parents' part. We have been talking about the kids, but wait a minute, you know as parents we have needs and we can't all have a big red "S" on our chest. (F3, 159 FFG#1)

F11 works and does not have time to be involved.

> If I wasn't working I would be volunteering or doing something. You know sometimes it is just a matter of what you can fit into your schedule and into your life. (F11, 502 FFG#3)

Life stresses and obligations also were mentioned as obstacles to relationships. F2, who has a foster child with extensive needs, pointed out that the energy needed to meet the needs of the child has resulted in her not having the time to support her child in extracurricular activities.

> Our daughter would be more involved if we had more time for her. Our foster child . . . has taken a tremendous amount of energy. [As a result] we have really sacrificed a lot. And that sacrifice is extracurricular activities. We just didn't have the emotional energy.

Family Members' Views of Obstacles to the Development of Partnerships with Teachers

In examining the perceptions of family members regarding obstacles to developing partnerships with teachers three themes emerged: (a) lack of teacher time,

(b) lack of family member time, and (c) lack of communication.

Family members in all three focus groups mentioned the lack of teacher time as an obstacle to developing partnerships. Lack of teacher time was seen as the result of too many students in the classroom and the requirement of too much paperwork from the district and the state.

Having too many students in the classroom is seen by family members as overwhelming the teachers, and making it difficult for teachers to establish communications with the families of their students. F3, F6, and F12, all from different focus group sessions, pointed out

> There are so many students that teachers are responsible for. There is so little time outside of the teaching time. I think that those are things that make it difficult to establish a good working communication with the teachers . . . It must be overwhelming for teachers if every parent really requested their time. I don't know what the answer is. (F3, 47 FFG#1)
>
> The sheer number alone has got to be tremendous. I mean to try to contact every parent that you [the teachers] need to, there is just not enough time to do that. (F6, 248 FFG#2)
>
> Too many students in the classroom. They have more than they were supposed to have, several children more than they were told that they were going to have. They were overwhelmed [from] the first day of school. (F12, 444 FFG#3)

Excessive paperwork requirements from the district are seen to take away from the time that teachers have to spend with children.

> I think that teachers are overburdened with paperwork from the district. That just adds to their workload, which they don't need. I wish that they would just spend time teaching our kids. (F8, 443 FFG#3)

Lack of time for family members is also a potential obstacle to the development of partnerships. Indeed, the issue of family member time even emerged in the recruiting of family members for the focus group sessions. The most frequent reason given for declining to participate was that the family member was "too busy." Another factor that emerged in the recruitment of family members for the focus groups could be arbitrarily called a "lack of well-adjustedness." This refers to the family member displaying a sense of being overwhelmed by life's challenges and circumstances. These points also emerged in the focus group discussion. F11 pointed out that:

> I am tired, I work full-time and my health isn't that good and I can't be involved with the school on a daily or weekly basis. (F11, 404 FFG#3)

Family members who were able to be actively involved at the middle school expressed empathy for those family members who could not. F15 pointed out that because she is at the school a lot, she knows what is going on. However, she pointed out:

> But then there is the parent who can't come, whether they are working or not, is not able to come, and there is nothing they can do about that. (F15, 481 FFG#3)

Summary

Family members perceive that television, the Internet, and changes in society present value conflicts between themselves and media images presented to their children. Differing values between the family and some community members are seen as major obstacles to partnerships and communication. The lack of family member time is also perceived as an obstacle to partnerships.

The stresses of life and the lack of emotional energy of family members influence the amount of time they perceive they have to participate and be involved both with community members and at the middle school. Obstacles to the formation of partnerships with teachers include lack of teacher and family member time, and lack of communication, and teachers being overburdened by too many students and too much paperwork.

Family Members' Perceptions Regarding what Would Facilitate Partnership Relations Among the Participant Groups

Family members emphasize that activities should be fun for the children and increased family involvement would facilitate the relationship between family members and community members. F11 pointed out that if community members would stress that the activities are just for fun, it would help the relationship.

> I think [they need to] have the understanding that these extracurricular activities are to be fun. (F11, 523 FFG#3)

F14 agreed, and added that "They [should not] give the kids stress" (F14, 526 FFG#3). The elimination of the stress between family values and expectations as discussed in the obstacles to the relationship section would help the relationship.

F4 and F7 indicated that getting to know teachers in an informal setting would help to establish a relationship between family members and middle level teachers. F7 related an experience as a member of a work party as being "A kind of pseudo team building, if you will . . . Getting to know the teachers in maybe a little less tense environment" (F7, 258 FFG#2). F4 also sees the value of informal contact in a social setting. He related that he was at a school play and he had an opportunity to talk to teachers in an informal manner.

> This was a social setting. There may be something to just having a social event, a gathering event, that helps in establishing a relationship. Not because you have an issue, but just to establish a relationship. (F4, 256 FFG#2)

Chapter Summary

In general, family members indicate that, they have good or very good relationships with their children's middle school teachers and the community members who work with their children. However, family members also see that issues dealing with communications, value conflicts, lack of teacher time, and lack of family member time can present obstacles to the development of partnerships.

Family members indicate that their relationships with community members are more relaxed than their relationships with teachers, perhaps because some family and community members also share social ties. However, family members also believe that relationships with coaches can be "intense" when the coaches get too serious. The intensity in the relationship is perceived as the result of value conflicts between the family member and the community member, which--in turn--pose obstacles to the development of partnerships.

Lack of communication is mentioned as an issue for family members in the relationship between community members and teachers. A possible conflict of values is seen as an obstacle to communication with community members. Family members who volunteer more than once a month appear to be more aware of opportunities for communications with teachers than family members who volunteer at the middle school less than once a month. Both F7 and F4 perceive that getting to know the teachers in a social setting where family members and teachers could converse in an informal manner would help to establish a relationship and improve communication.

In addition, the lack of teacher time and family member time is seen as an obstacle to the development of partnerships. Family members think teachers have too many students and are burdened by excessive paperwork. Family members' lack of time results from work, as well as feeling overwhelmed by life's challenges and circumstances, leaving little or no time to participate in partnerships. The amount of effort necessary to find activities for their children to participate in, is an obstacle to family member involvement with community activities. Nevertheless, family members see they have a responsibility to be involved with their children's activities and also believe that increased family involvement would help to facilitate partnerships between family members and community members. This presents a possible contradiction between what family members believe they should do and what they perceive is within their ability.

CHAPTER V

THE FINDINGS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF WORKING WITH FAMILY MEMBERS AND TEACHERS TO BENEFIT MIDDLE LEVEL CHILDREN

Introduction

This chapter presents community members' perceptions regarding working with family members and teachers to benefit middle level children. The findings are organized using four topics from the focus group guide: (a) relationships among the groups, (b) responsibilities in the relationships, (c) obstacles to the development of partnerships, and (d) facilitation of partnerships.

Community Members' Perceptions of Relationships with Family Members and Teachers

The findings of community members' perceptions of relationships are presented in three parts: (a) history of community members' interactions with family members and teachers, (b) community members' perceptions of relationships with family members, and (c) community members' perceptions of relationships with teachers.

History of Interactions

Community members indicated on the focus group questionnaire the percentage of family members with whom they have met or talked. Table 15 indicates the community members' interactions with family members.

Table 15

Community Members' Interactions with the Family Members of the Children They Work with: The Percentage of Family Members They Have Met or Talked To

All	75% +	50-74%	25-49%	Less than 25%	None
(1) 16.7% Scout Master/4-H	(2) 33.3% Church Group, Camp Counselor	(1) 16.7% Service Learning	(2) 33.3% Coach, Police	0	0

N = (6)

Fifty percent of the community members had interactions with 75% or more of the family members. The Scout Master, Church group leaders, and the church camp counselor had interactions with 75% or more of the family members of the children they work with. The community members involved with children through service learning had interactions with 50% to 74% of the family members. The coach and the police resource officer had interactions with between 25% and 49% of the family members. All of the community members had interactions with more than 25% of the family members.

A necessary condition for the establishment of a relationship is that there be interactions among the two or more people or groups involved in an association that continues for a sufficient period of time for expectations to be established. Some of the community members in the focus group session do not have any interactions with teachers, and therefore some community members believe a relationship does not exist.

The frequency of interactions between community members and teachers appears to be dependent upon the type of activity the community members are involved with. Community members involved in 4H, scouting, and church groups have little or no contact with teachers. The coach, police resource officer, and the community member involved with service learning projects have some contact and interactions with all of the teachers. Table 16 shows the interactions community members have with teachers.

Table 16

Community Members' Interactions with the Teachers of the Children They Work with: The Percentage of Teachers They Have Met or Talked To

All	75% +	50-74%	25-49%	Less than 25%	None
(3) 50% Coach, Police, Service Learning	0	0	0	(2) 33.3% Scout Master/4-H Church Group	(1) 16.7% Church Group

N = (6)

These limited interactions may indicate that the community members' perceptions are not based on the interactions that the community members have with the teachers at River Middle School, but rather their perceptions of teachers in general as a group. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, the perspectives of the community members could be seen as the interpretation by the community member of past experiences as students and family members, or shaped by interactions with other people who are not teachers.

Community Members' Relationships with Family Members

The context of the activity the community member is involved in appears to influence the development of the relationship between community members and family members. C4, a Scout Master, and C2, a church youth group leader and 4H leader, provide evidence of this. C4 points out that, although the major emphasis is on the children, he tries to get family members actively involved.

> We succeed with the parents in a lot of ways because we try to involve them. They may not always be there and that is okay. Our major concern is with the boys, but on the whole we have good relations with family members . . . We tell the parents "don't be afraid to ask--we understand the situation. We try to have a supportive relationship." We have ceremonies we invite [family members] to and that helps the parents to get involved. (C4, 100)

C2 is involved with middle level children both as a church youth group leader and as a 4H leader. She indicates that she has a very good relationship with the family members of the children in the youth group. The relationships with the family members of the children involved with 4H are more widespread.

> I would describe my relationship as very good. I know some parents from the youth group are going to be at a convention somewhere, and I am going to be staying with their youth. And I feel that is the kind of relationship that I have with most of the parents that I know. That [family involvement] is a big thing with the youth group. But, when you get into 4H, you don't usually meet the parents because the program caters mostly to the youth and trying to give them different skills and such, but then we also try to get the parents involved but I find the attitude of a lot [of family members] is "we are too busy. There are too many things going on. We are just too busy" . . . So it [the relationship] is real wide spread. (C2, 98)

With the family members from the church group that C2 knows well, the relationships are very good. However, many of the family members of children involved in the 4H program are perceived by C2 as projecting an attitude that they are too busy to be involved.

C1 and C6, share the belief that some family members see them as baby-sitters. C1, the recreational director of a residential agency, states that she has little contact with most family members. She talks to family members when the children start to volunteer at the agency but has little contact with family members after the children start volunteering. However, she indicates some dissatisfaction with the family members who she perceives see her as a baby-sitter.

> I have a hard time . . . When summer time comes, approximately two weeks before school is out, I probably get about 100 calls from parents. Their child all of a sudden wants to volunteer in the [agency], and most of the time I will meet them [the family members], but that is the last time. I also work with developmentally disabled and I know that those parents are very supportive. They involve themselves, they come help. I find it almost like baby-sitting. And I have said that to parents, "You know, I am not a baby-sitter." So, I kind of think that, you know, for different reasons, parents having kids but they shouldn't be having kids because they don't have the time . . . well, that is the way it is. I mean, they are here, so working on the kids, as everybody here is talking about . . . I think that is our main focus, being a party in touching their [the kids] lives, like you said . . . I think through the kids we can help the parents. (C1, 128)

C6, the coach, indicates that middle level children do not want their families to be involved in their activities.

> At the middle-school level in particular I think that . . . the children decided that they don't want their mom and dad around. I look at it from the standpoint that it becomes an hour I am free-baby-sitting . . . There is not even a question anymore [for family members]. When [their children] are in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade . . . poof . . . you [the family members] are gone. "I'll be back." If I had to tell you how many times I have had to sit after practice with older children--a lot of time sixth, seventh, and eighth graders are about in tears because mom and dad didn't show up for an extra half hour. When mom and dad do show up after that extra half hour it is just, "Get in the car." All I can feel is for an hour-and-a-half, not just an hour, I have made better impact on that person's [child's] life than the one who came and picked her up. (C6, 124)

C6 indicates that with some family members he has a poor relationship and thinks he is seen as a baby-sitter. In addition, he indicates

> dissatisfaction with the stress placed on children by family members who are late picking children up from practice and believes that he is a more positive influence on the child than the family member, perhaps indicating value conflicts between himself and family members.

Community Members' Relationships with Teachers

The type of activity the community member is involved in appears to influence the frequency of interactions between community members and teachers. As well, C3, a church group youth leader and C4, a Scout leader, indicated that they have very little involvement with teachers. "I have very little, if any, involvement with teachers" (C3, 22). "In Scouting we have very little contact with teachers at all" (C4, 25). C1, who is involved with service learning projects with River Middle School, states that she does have some involvement.

> I have a little involvement, because generally the teachers are bringing the kids out. Unfortunately, with all the budget cuts, that's coming to an end. Our kids are not able to have as many field trips to our agency and that sort of involvement isn't happening as much. So, I am seeing a big decline the last couple of years. I deal more with Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts. When they want to do a program we will set it up with [my agency]. (C1, 24)

From the sports perspective, however, C6 indicates that his relationship with teachers is mixed.

> . . . From a sports standpoint, you don't get a lot of teachers who really care. I mean, it's not an academic program so go ahead and do what

> you want. But when they see the enthusiasm that it gets over to the kids, then a lot of them do, you know, promote them. I will leave it at that. It runs a gambit [sic]. I think there are some great teachers and then there are some just average to poor ones out there, too. (C6, 28)

The perception that the quality of the teachers "runs a gambit" is based on C6's perception that some teachers support after-school programs by promoting them and other teachers have no interest in after-school programs because they are not "academic."

Much of the discussion by the community members dealing with their relationships with teachers centered around how they believe teachers meet individual students' needs, not necessarily on the relationship between community members and teachers. C2 thinks some teachers do an excellent job of meeting children's needs.

> . . . You can only expect the teachers to do so much. They have a lot that they have to do. And some do an excellent job of going out of their way to doing a lot of extra for these youth. (C2, 85)

In discussing the relationship with teachers, C3, a church youth group leader, indicates that teachers have a limited amount of time and that it is difficult for teachers to keep in touch with every child. He thinks that when considering the children's well-being, teachers have to depend on groups outside of the school to support children in different aspects of their lives. He does not believe that teachers have to be involved with the community groups to a large extent. C4, a Scout Master and 4-H leader, sees a reluctance on the part of the teachers to reach out and have contact with every child. He compares the teacher's job to his job. The following exchange took place between C3 and C4.

> Well, there is a limit to how much they [teachers] can involve themselves with any one given student, especially the middle school . . . They are dealing with several classes a day . . . It is just a time constraint. I mean, you [teachers] don't have time to touch base with every child. I mean you could touch base with them and say, "How's it going? Is everything going okay with you?" And stuff like that. But . . . teachers have to depend on other groups outside of school to make sure that their children's well-being is being supported by different aspects of what their life is involved with; not necessarily that teachers have to be involved to a huge extent. (C3, 37)

> It is a difference in attitude, in the difference the way they perceive and do their job. That is the perception that I get . . . But, you know, there is a reluctance [on the part of the teachers to reach out to every child] . . . I've got a lot of people working for me . . . I have to touch bases with everyone. I have to make sure that their welfare is taken care of . . . I mean I am in a high production environment. I need to make sure those people are highly productive and satisfied. And that encompasses a whole range of issues. (C4, 38)

When asked, "Is there anything you would like to see changed in the relationship?," the community members addressed the question from two perspectives. In one perspective the community members discussed the relationship in terms of individual children. In the second perspective the community members discussed the relationship from a more programmatic, holistic perspective.

C4, speaking as a Scout Master, did not see how a relationship between community members and teachers could be formed in the first place. He indicates that he does not believe that he should be involved with the teacher of an individual child. His comments were followed by C5 pointing out that the law forbids teachers to discuss a juvenile without the family members' permission.

> How do you know who to contact? Your contact usually is the boy that you are working with. But normally I don't think I should involve the school teacher. That is usually something that you don't think about. You may talk to the boys; you may talk to the parents to see what the issue is--exposing the problem, but you never, at least it never enters my life that you should go out and talk to the school teacher. You get feedback from how a kid is doing at school from his parents, and they come to you and say, "What can we do?" They [the family member] may have gone to the teacher, I don't know. But they do come to us and say, "We need help." We try to get them involved in other things, and so on. But it doesn't enter our mind to involve the teacher. And I wouldn't know--asking the boys, "Who are your teachers?" Immediately, if there is an issue or something, he gets very defensive and so on. So . . . whom to contact on the other side, and parents don't want you necessarily to get involved on that side of things as well, if you are in an outside activity such as Boy Scouts. So, I am not sure even how the relationships can be formed in the first place. That is the first issue that I would see. I am not sure how you would go about doing that. (C4, 49)

> If you were the outsider and you were to approach the teacher about a particular kid, that teacher is not going to be able to talk to you about that child. There are a lot of things about that privacy act that allows nobody to talk about anything about a juvenile, unless you have a written consent from the parents and the teacher's already been notified. But if you don't have that written consent and the teacher hasn't been notified, there is no way that you are going to get any information out of that school because of the privacy act. (C5, 50)

Clearly, C4 and C5 believe that community members should not be discussing individual children with teachers.

Table 17 shows the frequency of sharing information with teachers about children. Table 17 shows that the majority of the community members (50%) never share information regarding individual children with the child's teachers.

Table 17

Community Members' Frequency of Sharing Information Regarding the Children the Community Members Work with,- with the Children's Teachers During the 1996-1997 School Year

	One or more times a week	One or two times a month	One or two times a grading period	One or two times a year	Never
7. Shared information about the children you work with, with their teachers	0	0	(1) 16.7%	(2) 33.3%	(3) 50%

(N = 6)

In looking at the relationships from a holistic perspective, C3 suggested that if there was some kind of communication and connection between teachers and community members, it would help to develop relationships. C3 believes that teachers probably do not know what community programs are available for children and do not know how to contact community groups. C3 grew up in a small community where the teachers lived in the community and know what was happening in the community. He points out that:

> Maybe if there were some kind of connection, even on an informal basis between the teachers and whatever. I grew up in a small town and all the teachers were members of all the churches that were in town, which means that they knew about all of the stuff that was going on. They knew about Scout groups, they knew about the youth groups, everything like that, which means it was a little easier for them because on the top of their head they were involved with the groups themselves in their own volunteer basis. But in larger communities it is a little bit more difficult, in that some of the teachers don't even live in the area where their teaching is. It is difficult for them to understand any of the community things that are available . . . If there was some way for the teachers to have some frame of reference to where they knew about all of the activities that were going on, and maybe that might stimulate some kind of response. I would . . . guess that half of the teachers out there are not aware, or even if they were, have no idea how to get into contact with some of the groups, or even if they would care to get in contact with some of the groups that are available. (C3, 74)

C4, who also has experience living in a small community, indicates that might be helpful if the community could get together to discuss issues and problems.

> On the east coast we were living in a small town with much more community. And we had a lot of feedback from a lot of people. You actually got

> feedback. There is a sense of community and community spirit and supportive action for much of what was happening in the community itself. So, yeah, if you were teaching in the community you knew what was going on. You knew you had Scout troops; you knew you had Cub packs, and they actually invited you into the schools. Whereas, now, in Lake I feel a reluctance to do that. It is a fight sometimes. So, I think . . . it's a coming together, there is an awareness of community sense, community spirit. If somehow those mechanisms for community--for portions of the community to get together just to discuss the issues and problems that are arising, then I think that would provide some valuable insight into what is happening with some of the teenagers today . . . (C4, 72)

Summary

- The degree of the development of a relationship between community members, family members, and teachers varies with the context of activity. The relationships between family members involved in the church group family members involved in the Boy Scouts are reported to be very good. The involvement of family members of children who are doing community service, 4H, and sports is not as extensive as that of family members whose children are involved in Boy Scouts and the church youth group. In describing the relationship between themselves and family members, the coach, and the recreational director of a residential agency, use the term "baby-sitting" to describe how some family members view the activity.

Some community members question if community members should have contact or a relationship with teachers about individual children. The coach, indicates that a lot of teachers do not really care about sports programs. However, he points out that teachers' attitudes "run the gambit" from great teachers to just average to poor ones.

When asked if there was anything the community members would like to see changed in the relationship, it was suggested that improved connections and communication would benefit the relationship. He believes that teachers do not know what community programs are available or who to contact to get information.

Community Members' Perceptions Regarding Responsibilities in the Relationships Between Community Members and Family Members, and Community Members and Teachers

To elicit community member perceptions of responsibilities in the relationships between community members and family members, and community members and teachers, two questions were asked: (a) From your perspective, what do you think your responsibilities are, if any, in working with family members and teachers--what is your "job" in the relationship, and (b) What are the responsibilities of the family members and teachers in working with you? The findings are presented in four sections: (a) community member perceptions of their responsibilities in relationships with family members, (b) community member perceptions of the family members' responsibilities in relationships, (c) community members' perceptions of their responsibilities in relationships with teachers, and (d) community member perceptions of teachers' responsibilities in relationships.

Community Members' Views of Their Responsibilities in Relationships with Family Members

Community members believe their responsibilities are to provide a safe environment and to be a positive role model for the children. Community members think the family members' responsibility is to be involved in their children's activities.

C6 mentions that in sports-related activities, safety and being a good role model are the major responsibilities of the coach.

> The whole issue . . . in a sport-related activity is the safety and also the well being and happiness of the children . . . [and that the coach] be a good role model for the child. (C6, 102)

C1 mentions that she sees her responsibility as being a role model, especially with children who have problems at home.

> . . . I think having a role model for them, [the children] if you can be that role-model for them, it makes it a little easier for them to go home and deal with what they have. (C1, 130)

Community Members' Views of Family Members' Responsibilities in Relationships

Community members believe that family members are responsible for supporting community programs by being involved with the program and informing their children about what community activities are available. In response to the questions, "What do you think the responsibilities of the family members are in the relationship," C3 stated:

> . . . They should be involved to a certain extent in order just to know what kids are being exposed to . . . And I realize for some parents that is very difficult, especially for a lot of parents that work long hours and stuff like that--it is very difficult for them to get involved. They can even get involved peripherally just by asking/talking to the kids about it, "How was your day today?" You know? "You went to your Scout meeting . . . what went on with that?" (C3, 107)

C3 believes that sometimes it takes effort on the family members' part to find out about what community programs are available.

> Sometimes takes a pretty conscious effort on their [the family members] part to find out about all the things that are going on in the community in order to keep their kids . . . just get the information out in the air. (C3, 114)

Community Members' Views of Their Responsibilities in Relationships with Teachers

C6 answered the question about community members' responsibilities by asking questions about how to promote enthusiasm. By doing so he suggests that being enthusiastic and promoting enthusiasm in others is an important facet of a community program.

> How do you promote enthusiasm? If a teacher thinks 4H is a valid, positive influence and has some kids that he/she especially thinks would be . . . benefit from that, they're probably going to be enthusiastic about 4H especially in how it relates to those kids. But how do you promote enthusiasm in all those other areas? . . . The level of enthusiasm that we pass along to our children is either contagious, or just falls through the cracks like anything else. So, how do you promote enthusiasm? How do you get any program that the community provides across in a positive and enthusiastic, refreshing manner to a middle school kid, or anyone for that matter. (C6, 76)

C5 addressed some of the questions C6 asked regarding how to promote enthusiasm by suggesting that community members should invite teachers to be involved in community activities.

> There are some ways to do that and one of the best ways that I have seen to get them involved is sort of on a periphery basis, inviting them to things like as a guest speaker, or maybe just inviting them to just come to some of the soccer games. Say, "Hey, the kids are involved in this. Come and see how much they are involved in it. It will give you a better idea about the program." And that is something simple, just "Come on down and see a game." No big deal. The same thing with some of the church groups, "Come in. We would like you to speak on this matter, just to hear your opinions." The same thing would work with the Scouts in some circumstances. It is just a matter of if the teachers don't have the time to get involved, then, maybe it is the responsibility of some of the community groups to maybe take a step forward--invite them into the groups. Let them get a little more experience. Let them touch

> base and let them see what is going on, showing them what the options are that are available. (C5, 78)

C5 clearly perceives that it is the community groups' responsibility to initiate contact with teachers so that teachers will know what is happening in the community and what options are available for children.

Community Members' Views of the Teacher's Responsibilities in Relationships

Some community members believe that the teachers have the responsibility to support the whole child and provide information to the children regarding community programs. C6 clearly sees that the teachers have a responsibility to give some children extra attention to assist them to become involved with community activities. He specifically addresses the needs of children from the far end of the spectrum who may need special attention.

> . . . You have children at the end of the spectrum where you have the broken homes, things like that. Children need a little more attention to get them into stuff that they need to be involved in, and it is a teacher's responsibility to do stuff like that. (C6, 41)

This was followed by C1 agreeing with C6 and pointing out that teachers can do more to address the children's needs and also utilize the community to help.

> I kind of agree . . . But I think that teachers can do more and I think that they can address these kids a little bit more. And utilize some of the other people within the school, or

> outside in the community, to help . . . (C1, 43)

C4 added later in the focus group session that teachers should "make the child aware of extra opportunities without pushing any one particular opportunity" (C4, 79).

Summary

Some community members see their role with families as providing a safe environment and being a positive role model for children. They think that family members have a responsibility to be involved in their children's activities. Involvement includes knowing what the children are being exposed to and informing their children of what activities are available.

In relation to teachers, some see their responsibility in the relationship as being enthusiastic about community programs and inviting teachers to participate in them. Community members believe that the teacher's responsibility is to meet the needs of each child and to make the children aware of extracurricular opportunities. In addition, community members believe that it is the teacher's responsibility to help children become involved in community activities.

Community Members' Perceptions of Obstacles to the Development of Partnerships

The findings of community members' perceptions of obstacles to the development of partnerships are presented in two parts. First, community members' perceptions of obstacles to partnerships with family members are discussed. Second, community members' perceptions of obstacles to partnerships with teachers are discussed.

Community Members' Views of Obstacles to the Development of Partnerships with Family Members

Factors that are perceived by community members as obstacles to the development of partnerships with family members are: (a) family member time and communication regarding the activities available in the community, (b) the personal views of family members, and (c) value conflicts.

C3, when discussing family members' responsibilities in the relationship, community members expressed that family member time prevented some families from being involved in their children's activities. The belief that lack of family member time can present an obstacle to family members' involvement is shared by C2 and C5. C2 points out that

> There are so many parents that work full-time. They just don't have the time to get involved

> with the extracurricular activities that their kids are doing. (C2, 85)

C5 expresses that for some family members it is very difficult, if not impossible, for family members to be involved.

> When I grew up, my dad, for instance . . . would leave for work at 4:00 in the morning. He would come back at 10:00 at night . . . it was no fault of my father that he couldn't spend time during the week with us. They can make time, but it is sometimes a scheduled impossibility for some parents. It is not impossible, but it can be very, very difficult for some parents to deal with things like that. (C5, 111)

Conversely, C6 sees the issue as not a matter of the lack of time but rather the placement of priorities. He believes that if the individual feels it is a priority, everyone has the time to be involved. He points out that he works long hours, but because he places a high priority on coaching he finds time to do it.

> We are talking about the issue of good parenting verses bad parenting . . . I am sick of people that say they don't have time. Because they do have time, because whatever their priority is as a parent, as an adult, as a community leader, as a volunteer, as a whatever, everyone has the time, can make time for some child. I don't care how many hours you work. I work 70, 80, 90 hours a week, but I have four hours a week that I spend with those kids out on that field--every single week night at 5:30. It's my priority to be there. No job gets in my way. (C6, 108)

In the previous section C3 pointed out that it takes a conscious effort for family members to find out about the things that are taking place in the community.

Communication among groups--family members, community members, and schools--regarding what programs are available is perceived as an obstacle by both C3 and C2. C2 mentions that families and children do not know what is available in the community and do not know where to go to get the information regarding what is available.

> . . . A lot of what I see is just that some of the families that have kids don't know where they can go and the parents or the schools aren't letting them know where they can go, or where they can get the information. (C2, 89)

The personal views of the family members can also present an obstacle to the development of partnerships. Personal views are pointed out by C3 to include family members not valuing extracurricular activities and thus not encouraging their children to participate in extracurricular activities.

> . . . If at some point in their early life (the parents' early life), they thought that the Boy Scouts were useless, or church group useless, they are not going to talk about it to their kids because of their own personal views. (C3, 120)

Conflicting viewpoints of family members and the community members can also be an obstacle to the development of partnerships. When asked to consider the obstacles to the development of partnerships, the following exchange involving C3, C4, C6, and C5 took place. It provides an example of the community members' perceptions of how conflicting views and conflicts of interest can influence a partnership.

> Conflicting viewpoints. (C3, 151)

> Conflict of interests. (C4, 152)

> What's negative about that? (C6, 153)

> It can be. (C3, 154)

> What is the negative aspect of that--sometimes, you know, two people can't agree on anything and, you know, it is your opinion and it is my opinion, but is that a negative, or is it just an opportunity for us to state our opinion, maybe sway somebody else's opinion or open their eyes. (C5, 155)

Conflicting viewpoints are perceived by C5 as resulting in two people not being able to agree on things. He also believes that conflicting views provide an opportunity for both parties to state their opinion and sway the other person's opinion. C5 appears to emphasize changing the other person's views. He does not mention it as an opportunity to gather information and reach a compromise. Rather, his emphasis appears to be to "open their eyes."

Community members think that changing values of society and what is perceived by family members as acceptable are obstacles to the healthy development of children. C3 points out that middle level children are

> Experiencing things in middle school that we didn't experience until three years into high school. It is just amazing what they are being exposed to at such an early age. (C3, 54)

C2 mentioned that children are facing issues that are "unbelievable, that we would have never thought about until after high school . . . There are middle school girls out there that are pregnant now" (C2, 62). C5 sees that the values of society have changed what is acceptable to some family members.

> Our basic values don't change. What you believed when you were younger is still there. So when a parent turned around and said, "I don't have time," someone who turns around and wants someone else to raise their children. No matter what we do as a community, no matter what teachers do, [parents] values have changed so much that we have accepted the fact that the 13- or 14-year-old girl can get pregnant and there are no ramifications. And that 13- or 14-year-old girl has the choice of keeping that child and raising that child. But as soon as that child becomes difficult, she gives it to the mom, the grandma and she goes off and is pregnant again. She thinks . . . that's the values of being raised, because her mother or her father didn't show her differently. (C5, 121)

C5 clearly sees the values that he believes are being transmitted to children by some family members as being in conflict with his values.

Community Members' Views of Obstacles to the Development of Partnerships with Teachers

Four themes emerged from the discussion that are seen as obstacles to the development of partnerships with teachers. These include: (a) the teacher's attitude and lack of interest in community programs, (b) lack of teacher time, (c) obstacles dealing with communication and lack of teacher knowledge regarding what community programs are available, and (d) the separation of Church and State.

The teacher's attitude can be an obstacle to the development of relationships between community members and teachers according to C4 and C6. C6 points out, referring to sports, "You don't get a lot of teachers who really care" (C6, 28). C4 believes that the attitude of the teacher and how they perceive their job influences how they see their responsibilities to make sure that children's welfare is taken care of (C4, 38).

C2, C3, and C6 indicate that teacher time and workload may be an obstacle to the teacher's meeting the needs of the whole child and creating partnerships. "You can only expect the teachers to do so much. They have a lot that they have to do" (C2, 85). ". . . It is just a time constraint . . . [teachers] don't have time to touch base with every child . . ." (C3, 37). ". . . The higher the number of students that they come in contact with, it is a level up for how extraordinary of a teacher they have to be to meet time constraints" (C6, 44).

Lack of communication and lack of teacher knowledge regarding the availability of community programs are obstacles to the development of partnerships. C4 indicates he would not know who to contact to talk to a teacher of one of the children with whom he works (C4, 49). C3 believes that teachers do not know what programs are available or how to establish communication.

> If there was some way for the teachers to have some frame of reference to where they knew about all of the activities that were going on, and maybe that might stimulate some kind of a response. I would guess that half of the teachers out there are not aware, or even if they were [aware] have no idea how to get into contact with some of the groups . . . (C3, 74)

In discussing their relationships with teachers, C5 and C4 both indicated that they did not believe that discussing individual children with the teacher may be appropriate or legal. In addition, community members see that issues regarding the separation of Church and State are obstacles, not only regarding the church youth group leaders but also the Boy Scout program.

C3 a church youth group leader states:

> . . . [In] our involvement . . . [there is the issue of] the separation of Church and State . . . The teachers really can't promote Church-related activities and stuff like that in the classroom environment. Maybe they do, but they're not supposed to, I realize some do. But, as a rule, that is something that they are not supposed to be doing. (C3, 51)

T12, speaking in her role as the wife of a husband who works with children through a church, points out how it is difficult for community members who work with church youth groups to connect with the school.

> . . . My husband works with youth in the community through a church . . . A great deal of what he sees as his role with kids, is . . . what I see as my role with kids: To help kids have the tools they need to function in society, to make smart choices, to make healthy choices, and those are the kinds of things that he does, extensively with kids . . . He has tried to find opportunities to meet with kids and eat lunch with them, or bring them a McDonald's, just to be an adult that is there, that's supportive, to go to sporting events. The response from school has not been very open . . . From his perspective he hasn't had a great deal of success being able to get in. He is the sort or person that if he has a kid that isn't succeeding, whose parent isn't doing anything and isn't involved, he would go and talk with the teacher with the kid. He would talk about how he could help the kid succeed. But the opportunity to do that isn't there as a community adult that is willing. And he works with a team of adults who work with 60 or 75 kids who are disadvantaged, and there just isn't a place for that. (T12, 334 TFG#2)

C4 and C6 related how the issue of religion is also an obstacle between the Boy Scouts and schools developing partnerships.

> How do you get teachers to indicate, you know, the Boy Scout movement, when the Boy Scout movement has religious beliefs . . . duty to God . . . it is there. It is not going to change. There is some conflict. (C4, 77)

Summary

Community members believe that lack of family member time, lack of communication and information about what community activities are available, the personal views of family members, and lack of communication between family members, schools, and community members are obstacles to the development of partnerships. Some believe that it is not family member time, but the family member not making involvement a priority that is an obstacle to partnerships. In addition, conflicts in values between community members and what they see as changes in society are perceived as obstacles to children's healthy development.

In regard to teachers, community members clearly believe that the individual teacher's attitude, the lack of teacher time, the lack of communication and lack of teacher knowledge regarding what community programs are available are obstacles to the development of partnerships. The lack of teacher time is also seen as preventing the teachers from meeting the needs of the whole child.

Some community members raise questions about the appropriateness of connecting with a teacher around an individual child. Thinking of relationships with teachers as centering around individual children rather than entire programs can be an obstacle to the formations of relationships.

Community Members' Perceptions Regarding what Would Facilitate Partnership Relations

Community members believe that getting more family members to volunteer and be active in community activities would facilitate partnership relations. Better communication between community members and teachers and between teachers and children to inform them of opportunities in the community would facilitate relationships between community members and teachers.

C6 thinks that for family members to become involved, community members should insure that family members feel welcome.

> You get the parent involved, make the family feel like they are welcome . . . if we all do things together, it is going to be a lot easier on everyone. (C6, 124)

C6's statement was followed by C5 suggesting that being successful with the children will encourage the family to become involved.

> . . . If we make the kid feel secure with us, or secure in the environment, they will want to come back. And that parent will see the change and the parent will want to get involved. (C5, 125)

C1 stresses that volunteers want to feel important and feel like they are doing something, not wasting their time.

> Most of my job is asking for volunteers. I directly ask and make sure they have a job. They want to feel important and they don't want to feel like they are hanging around, they don't want to feel like they are wasting their time, give them a job. (C1, 166)

Community members believe that teachers could facilitate relationships between community members and teachers in three ways: (a) by urging children to participate in community activities, (b) by helping community members to communicate with children about the availability of programs, and (c) by teachers participating in a dialogue with community members to discuss issues that are being faced by middle level children in the community.

C3 mentioned that teachers could facilitate partnerships by focusing on having children participate in community programs.

> They [teachers] could--even just focusing on doing extracurricular activities or community service and things like that would be a big help. There are a lot of kids out there that don't even go to church. They still could join up with a couple of groups, or Scouts . . . Some kids just don't know what is out there, or don't know how to get in touch, or involved with any of those groups. (C3, 70)

C4 also thinks that teachers could facilitate partnerships by "Making the children aware of extra opportunities . . ." (C4, 79).

Improved communication regarding getting information to the children about opportunities is perceived by C6 as a way that teachers and schools can support community programs. He sees the communication difficulties not as pertaining to getting the information into the school, but getting it out of the school and to the children.

> I think part of my problem . . . is getting the information out from the school, not necessarily

> getting the information into the school, but getting it from. What people said earlier about teachers are inundated with tasks and things that are not associated with the curriculum that they want to pass on to their children, plus they are being met with higher standards, I understand that. I think less and less time may be available to teachers to pass along things that may be exciting and new ideas . . . they don't get an opportunity to pass them along. And I will say that about registration forms, a simple registration form for our soccer program. The first thing is that if we wanted to contact every single teacher in school and allow them to pass out information we would not be allowed to do that. Information is given for registration to the office, the office says this information is available if your students want it. What teachers take any credence to that . . . it is just another piece of paper. It is an activity that is incredibly inexpensive . . . yet a lot of kids never know that it exists because it never leaves the office. There is no enthusiasm to get the stuff out . . . (C6, 71)

C6 believes policies established by the school about the dissemination of information regarding community programs may contribute to the information not reaching the students.

C4 thinks engaging the teachers and the community in a dialogue to discuss issues would facilitate relationships.

> Some sort of a forum on a yearly or six-month basis, where you just have a general open discussion as to the issues that are being faced in this area. (C4, 75)

Summary

Increased involvement of family members would help to facilitate partnerships according to some community members. They believe that making family members feel welcome, providing an environment for the child that will result in family members wanting to be involved, and giving family members something meaningful to do, would increase family member involvement.

Community members' perceptions regarding what would facilitate partnership relations between community members and middle level teachers center on communication. Teachers communicating to children the availability of extracurricular activities and urging children to participate are seen as ways teachers can support community members. C4 believes that teachers and community members communicating by way of a yearly forum to discuss issues that are being faced by middle level children in the community would facilitate partnerships.

Chapter Summary

Three common issues emerged from the discussion by community members regarding working with family members and teachers to benefit middle level children: (a) communication between community members and both family members and teachers, (b) time--both family member lack of time, and teacher lack of time, and (c) conflicting values between community members and family members, family members' attitudes, and teachers' attitudes.

Communication was mentioned as an issue when the community members were discussing the responsibilities of family members in the relationship and obstacles to the relationship. Community members believe family members have the responsibility to communicate with the community member who is working with the family member's child and to be actively involved with the activities in which their children participate. In addition, lack of communication emerged as an issue when the community members were discussing their relationship, responsibility in the relationship, obstacles to partnerships, and facilitating partnerships with teachers. Lack of communication with teachers is seen as resulting in teachers, family members, and children not knowing what community programs are available.

Lack of time--both family member time and teacher time--is seen as an obstacle to the development of partnerships and supporting children by community members. Lack of family member time is mentioned as a cause for the lack of family member involvement. C6 suggested that the obstacle is not lack of family member time but that family members do not make involvement a priority. In addition, community members indicated that, because of time constraints, teachers may not be able to consider the well-being of every child. Community members believe that some teachers do an excellent job of meeting the individual needs of children. However, they also indicate that there is a great variety in the quality of teachers, from great teachers to poor ones.

Conflicting values between community members and family members and the family member's attitude regarding extracurricular activities can present obstacles to the development of a partnership between community members and family members. Furthermore, teacher attitudes and lack of interest in community programs are seen as obstacles by community members to the development of partnerships between community members and teachers. Laws regarding the separation of Church and State and laws protecting the privacy of children are also mentioned as obstacles to the formation of partnerships.

Much of the discussion by the community members regarding their relationships with teachers centered around how they see teachers meeting individual children's needs, not necessarily on the relationship between community members and teachers. How they believe teachers meet individual student needs provides a snapshot of the community members' perceptions of the quality of the teachers. Community members see both the lack of teacher time and the teacher's attitude are seen as influencing how teachers meet individual children's needs.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS OF MIDDLE LEVEL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF WORKING WITH FAMILY MEMBERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO BENEFIT MIDDLE LEVEL CHILDREN

Introduction

This chapter presents teachers' perceptions about their relationships with family members and community members. The teachers' perceptions are organized using the first four topics from the focus group guide: (a) relationships between teachers and the other groups, (b) responsibilities in the relationship, (c) obstacles to the development of partnerships, and (d) facilitation of partnerships.

Occasionally in the discussion of one topic, important points pertaining to another topic emerge. For example, when discussing relationships between teachers and community members, factors that are also obstacles to the development of partnerships are discussed. The statements are presented in the discussion of the first topic and summarized and referred to in the second topic to which they pertain.

Teachers' Perceptions of Relationships with Family Members and Community Members

The findings regarding teachers' perceptions of relationships with family members and community members are presented in three parts: (a) history of interactions, (b) teachers' perceptions of relationships with family members, and (c) teachers' perceptions of relationships with community members.

History of Interactions

All of the teachers indicated on the questionnaire that they had good or very good relations with the family members of their students. The teachers' perceptions of their relations with family members as indicated on the questionnaire are shown on Table 18.

Table 18

Teachers' Perceptions of Relations with Family Members

Very Good	Good	Neither Good Nor Bad	Bad	Very Bad
(4) 33.3%	(8) 66.6%	0	0	0

N = (12)

All of the teachers participating in the focus groups had interactions with more than 25% of the families of their students. Table 19 shows the percentage of the students' families the teachers talked to on a professional basis during the 1996-1997 school year.

Table 19

Teachers' Interactions with Students' Families: Percentage of Families that Teachers Talked to on a Professional Basis During the 1996-1997 School Year by Type of License and Total

Type of License	Percentage of Families Teachers Talked to on a Professional Basis				
	All	75%+	50-74%	25-49%	Less than 25%
Elementary	0	(3) 75%	0	(1) 25%	0
Secondary	0	(1) 14.28%	(2) 28.57%	(4) 57.14%	
Handicapped Learner	(1) 100%	0	0	0	0
Total % of Classroom Teachers (N = 11)		(4) 36.36%	(2) 18.18%	(5) 45.45%	0

The number of teachers responding in each category is in parentheses. (N = 12)

One teacher who works with students identified as needing special programs is required by law to meet with the families of all students in the program. In determining the total percentage of contact with families, only the eleven classroom teachers were included in determining the percentages.

Compared to secondary licensed teachers, elementary licensed teachers were more inclined to contact family members on a professional basis. This may be the result of the differences in teacher education programs for elementary and secondary teachers. It may also reflect the personality differences between elementary and secondary teachers found by Wosley-George (1990). The largest percentage of the teachers with an elementary license (75%) had contact with 75% or more of the family members of their students. The largest percentage of teachers with a secondary license (57.14%) had contact with among 29 to 49% of the family members of their students.

Teachers' Relationships with Family Members

The initial response to the question, "Generally speaking, how do you feel about your relationship with the family members of your students?" was that the relationships are positive with the majority of the families.

T11 mentioned that communication is the key to the relationship.

> Communication is a key . . . I find if you want help, they [family members] will come and help you . . . Some are really good, but overall I think the key is communication. Always give them that welcome sign and make that a possibility for them if they have an opportunity. (T11, 245 TFG#2)

However, teachers indicate that there is not good communication with all family members. T5 said, with perhaps some frustration, that

> My interactions have been for the most part positive, but I think there are also a lot of

> parents where there is more potential for negative relationships. They are with parents I have not had a chance to talk to because they dodge my phone calls, or don't come to conference nights or anything like that. Overall the interactions are positive, but it's not necessarily with 100% participation by all families. You wish those other parents would get more involved, even if it means having to deal with some more unpleasant circumstances. (T5, 14 TFG#1)

This statement was followed by T2 saying

> I think my experiences have either been generally positive, oftentimes indifferent, and a couple of times each year negative. But the contact that I have with parents that are not initiated by me are rarely if ever on the "I'm concerned, I'd like to move forward on this" side of things. Progress reports go out midterm . . . lots of information provided by me, in writing, but no reciprocal attempt to try and converse by the parents. (T2, 15 TFG#1)

When asked how this made him feel he replied, "Disappointed" (T2, 17 TFG#1). A sense of frustration was expressed by T1 who indicated that as a result of family members not communicating with teachers, there may be problems of which the teachers are not aware. She mentioned rather than talking to the teacher, some family members may go straight to the principal (T1, 41 TFG#1).

T7 and 12, each with more than two decades of teaching experience, addressed their relationship with families taking into consideration the challenges of early adolescence and how it is a traumatic time for families as well as children and schools. They believe a change in the relationship developed when moving from a junior high school philosophy to a middle level philosophy.

T12, who taught at River when it was a junior high school, perceives that the transition to a middle school resulted in more personal relations between the teachers and the families. In establishing a relationship with the families, T12 perceives that teachers not only can help the child, but also the family.

> I think going from a junior high to a middle school, we became almost more personal. We felt that we needed to nurture the children. And therefore, nurture the family. I think that they are going through some adjustments as the children moved into the sixth grade. I see that happening a lot. I think that we take more time in trying to understand what a parent is going through and what is going on in the home. It is not only the child that we help but perhaps also the family. Last year I had a couple of families come to talk to me, not so much about the child but to just to talk. I think there really is a bond that occurs. I think our school has really set that up. (12, 241 TFG#2)

T12 lives in the community and says that she sees families in informal settings such as the grocery store and that families go out of the way to say "hello." Her length of service at River has enabled her to establish long-lasting relationships with the families. "I tend to have entire families go through my classes, which is very exciting" (T12, 241 TFG#2).

When asked, "Is there anything that you can think of that you would like to see changed in your relationship?," T12 and T10 responded that family members being proactive in communicating with teachers would help the relationship.

> I have a lot of students, and if I could change one thing, I wish that parents would just check in, "Hey, how is it going" or "I am concerned about this" . . . I wish that was something that I got more of, because it is really easier for me to pick up the phone and answer it, and talk for five minutes, than it is for me to go and find the kids' number, call the parents, figure out why they are not home, and those things. So, I wish that I could have a parent check in more often. That they would . . . do those things that give me the opportunity to have those conversations with them without me having to be the one to initiate the phone call. It is their child. (T12, 250 TFG#2)

> It would be nice if the parents were more proactive, instead of reactive. But in reality that is not going to happen. (T10, 251 TFG#2)

Although T10 would like family members to be proactive, he does not appear to believe that it will happen.

Teachers' Relationships with Community Members

In discussing relationships with community members, the teachers expanded the discussion to include not only the relationship with the "local community" but also the "larger community," including teacher beliefs regarding how the larger community and society in general perceive teachers.

The discussion of teachers' perceptions about their relationship with community and community members is presented in two sections to reflect the distinction the teachers make. The first section discusses how teachers see their relationship with the larger community. The second section presents the teachers' beliefs about their relationships with local community members.

Teachers' views of relationships with the "larger" community. The teachers clearly believe that society as a whole does not value teachers or schools. Statements such as "There is no support for teachers now" (T4, 39 TFG#1), "I think schools are low on the priority list of the general public" (T2, 178 TFG#1), and "The public relations that teachers have right now is just atrocious" (T6, 35 TFG#1) indicate that they think that society has a negative picture of teachers. Several teachers agreed with the statement made by T6 including T4 who added:

> Yes it [public relations] is atrocious! . . . not only the parents but what the students hear, see, and read, . . . I think we're climbing a really almost vertical battle. (T4, 36 TFG#1)

These teachers believe that society has a negative view of teachers and schools. Some teachers also have a negative perception of how society as a whole, and corporate America in particular, is influencing children.

The following exchange took place at the end of the first teacher focus group session.

> I've got to jump back on my bandwagon. Pointing fingers at families and pointing fingers at schools is not it. Corporate America has played an enormous role. (T5, 533 TFG#1)
>
> That's it, that's what my kids are getting. (T4, 533A TFG#1)
>
> Selling our kids products; sexualizing their behavior. (T5, 533 TFG#1)
>
> How many of our kids are going into the bathroom and throwing up their food to look thin? What's their self-esteem? (T6, 534 TFG#1)
>
> And the federal government trying to come up with easy solutions to complex problems, like rating television programs. (T5, 535 TFG#1)

T2 indicates that standards that are communicated by television to both children and family members are in conflict with the standards of the school.

> The standards that are communicated to kids where they spend a good portion of the time . . . right in front of the television set. That's where I point the finger. The parents have bought into much of the assumptions that mass media has told us about things we should be doing. We've all got stories. So I think a lot of blame rests with the culture. (T2, 42 TFG#1)

T7 does not see what is happening is society as appropriate and normal.

> I have been struck much in the last few years at how the society that we create in our schools, and very carefully create, is in many ways completely in contrast to what these children experience in every other part of

> their life. And, yet, I don't think that we cannot do that. I don't think that we can accept what is happening in society as being normal and appropriate, but it strikes me how often school is such a totally different, almost unreal, environment for some of these kids. Because it is a place where you can be treated nicely, you can have respect, where, you know, you don't get beat up. And where there is a sense of right and wrong, and caring for each other. That is a strange thing to feel that you are sort of a little island. (T7, 287 TFG#2)

The teachers believe they have a bad relationship with the larger community. This comes both from the perspective that the larger community has a negative view of teachers, and that teachers have a negative view of how society is influencing children.

Teachers' views of relationships with local community members. The teachers' perceptions of relationships with local community members depend on the context of the activity. The focus group discussion reveals that teachers visualize three distinct community groups: (a) community members who work with middle level children outside of school hours who are not involved in sports, for example, Scout leaders and 4H leaders, (b) community members who are involved with service learning programs through the school, and (c) coaches who are involved with sports programs that are not sponsored by the school.

Teachers have little contact with community members in programs such as Scouting and 4-H. The relationships the teachers mention exist primarily among community members with whom the teachers have developed relationships through service learning projects or community members involved with sports.

When asked specifically about after-school activities like Scouting and 4H, T8 responded, "There are things in the community. There is Scouting and 4H, but there isn't anything that's concocted with the schools" (T8, 351 TFG#2). T5 stated, "The only contact that I had was when I volunteered myself, when I was out in that community . . ." (T5, 116 TFG#1). In the second teachers focus group session T9 responded "I don't see them. I don't know who they are" (T9, 333 TFG#2). However, after-school programs use the school facilities and, according to T7, have an impact in terms of costs for utilities and wear and tear on the facilities. Despite these difficulties, T7 perceives that the school is a community center and that the teachers want community members to use it.

> Those programs do use our school, but they use our schools at night when we are not there, and there is conflict between the school and some of those organizations because it is somewhat burdensome on us as a school--we have higher electric bills, and higher custodian costs, and they aren't always very cooperative about the treatment of the facilities, and

> there are often conflicts with two groups who think they are in the same area and so, literally, punch it out in front of all the children--I mean, it's weird. We want those people. We think our school is a community center and should be. And, yet, that creates a lot of problems and headaches for us as well . . . (T7, 335 TFG#2)

Teachers have developed relationships with some community members through service learning projects. ". . . We have relationships with specific community organizations through service learning" (T5, 119 TFG#1). T5 describes the relationship with community members involved in service learning projects as "very good."

> It was very good, except that I find that people don't have tremendously accurate perspective about what goes on in the schools, so it was hard to get the programs to mesh . . . But, it was good. I mean I would like to pursue those relations, because I think they are important. (T5, 121 TFG#1)

T4 also indicates that she was pleased with her experience doing a service learning project because of the respect shown to the students by the community member.

> . . . We did a service project with [a community agency] . . . I was extremely pleased with their response to our students . . . The activities director of that facility established a very good rapport with the students and showed them great respect . . . (T4, 124 TFG#2)

The activities director referred to by T4 participated in the community member focus group. T5 perceive that the relationship between the teachers and the community members involved with specific service learning projects are good.

The teacher's perception of relationships with community members involved in community-sponsored after-school sports programs is mixed. T10 and T8, in the second teacher focus group, state:

> We are not very inviting. But oftentimes the school philosophically disagrees with how some of these organizations are being run. I know in the athletic mode, just the way they are structured and the people involved with them, philosophically doesn't fit with any of our buildings. We think that it is sort of counterproductive. So, there isn't a strong bond. The thing that amazed me last year was one of my colleagues was so amazed, she came to talk to me, that a soccer coach had called her and wanted to know the grades of all his soccer players. This is a community soccer coach, not a school. And she was so pleased because he was going to hold out the players that were failing with their school commitment, getting their work done. They weren't going to play the next week. And those are the kind of relationships that we [used to] build responsibility within the child when we had the school programs, and we don't see the community programs asking those things of children. We see them as being kind of "win" focused, very narrow focused, an elitist-type organization, and so the relationships with the school are not very good. I have coaches who want space in the school. Schools are not very accommodating. So, I am saying that I think there is an adversarial relationship in many cases between the school and some of our community programs. It is not a welcoming environment. (T10, 336 TFG#2)
>
> I think also, just along the lines of what you have said, that oftentimes there are community activities that kids are involved with, that you hear, "I didn't get my homework done,

> because I have youth group on Wednesday," or "I have soccer on Thursday," or "I have this . . . and by the time I get home I am tired." So, I think that sets us up to deal in competition for the time of the students that we are dealing with, where at least if that is a program that is within our building we can be aware of that, and the people who are running that program can be aware that this is the last week of the quarter, so let's not schedule four games for that week. Whereas, within the community I don't think that always takes place. (T8, 337 TFG#2)

T10 sees that the relationships with coaches are adversarial in many cases. He does not believe that the school is very inviting because of philosophical differences between the school and some sports programs. However, he also cites an example of the soccer coach initiating contact with a teacher to find out how children are doing in school. The soccer coach referred to by T10 took part in the community member focus group. T8 points out that the teachers and the coaches are in competition for the student's time. She also makes a distinction among programs that are "within our building," referring to programs that have teachers involved. (For example, some teachers coach a limited number of after-school activities that are sponsored in part by the school.) T8 infers that communication between "within our building" programs allow teachers and coaches to communicate regarding what is happening at school, such as the end of term testing. However, T8 believes that with community-based programs, communication does not take place.

When asked, "Is there anything you would like to see changed in the relationship?," T12 indicated that improved communication and support for school programs by community members would improve the relationship and help students.

> I agree with what T10 said earlier about some of the community services, sports, have been adversarial, and I have seen it happen. For example, with our drama program. When kids have wanted to participate in the plays and they have had practice after school, and the coaches have said, "You either show up for practice, or you don't show up." So, you have put a child that should experience both things in a very bad position. So, rather than putting a child through that . . . it would be nice if they could come to the drama teacher and say, "How could we work this out?" so the kid could participate in both positive things, rather than making the child choose and even badmouthing the school activity. So, I think there needs to be more communication and a willingness on their part to support the school programs. (T12, 339 TFG#2)

In discussing what would improve relationships, T3 indicates that community members being aware of activities taking place in the school would help.

> I think it would be nice if they [community members] were aware of what's going on in school, even if they didn't have kids there . . . If they were just kind of aware that there were activities at school that are important to the kids. (T3, 179 TFG#1)

Summary

Although the teachers believe that in general, their relationships with family members are good or very good, they also indicate a sense of frustration resulting from lack of communication with some family members. Some see relationships as not only dealing with the child, but also addressing issues that involve the family as a whole. Teachers would like family members to be more proactive rather than reactive, in their communication with teachers.

Teachers see that relationships with the larger community and society in general are negative. This belief is based on the teachers' impressions of how the larger community regards teachers and schools. Teachers also have a negative view of how the larger community influences middle level children. Finally, the teachers have varying relationships with community members who work with their students--depending on the context of the activity.

Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Responsibilities in the Relationships

Teacher perceptions regarding responsibilities in the relationships are presented in four parts: (a) teachers' perceptions of their responsibilities in relationships with family members, (b) teachers' perceptions of family members' responsibilities in relationships, (c) teachers' perceptions of their responsibilities in relationships with community members, and (d) teachers' perceptions of community members' responsibilities in relationships.

Teachers' Views of Their Responsibilities in Relationships with Family Members

Clearly, the teachers see that establishing communications with family members is a major part of the teachers' responsibility in the relationship. The teachers indicate that it is the teachers' obligation to build rapport with the family. In addition, teachers indicate that it is the teacher's responsibility to convey to family members when the teacher is available to communicate with family members and how the student is doing.

Teachers in both of the teacher focus groups indicate that their job in the relationship is to establish communication with family members. In response to the question, "What are your responsibilities in working with families?," T4 stated, "Communication" (T4, 44 TFG#1). T5 built on his remark and added,

> To establish communication with as many parents as you can. It is hard to do that because there are so many other things to do at the start of the year but if you establish

> some communication you get 100% cooperation throughout the year. That's really important. (T5, 45 TFG#1)

T4 then added, "Letting the parents know ways that they can be aware of how the child is doing and how you can be reached" (T4, 46 TFG#1). T3 mentions that teachers need to communicate good things about the students as well as when students need extra help.

> I think we need to communicate with the parents the good things the kids are doing as well as the areas where they need extra help, because many times parents get the attitude that the only time you guys ever call me is when my kid has messed up. So, they need to hear the good stuff, too. It doesn't have to be a phone call, it can be a little note. (T3, 54 TFG#1)

In the second teacher focus group, T10, T7, and T12 addressed the responsibility for teachers to communicate, and indicate there are a variety of ways that communication can take place. T12 extends the teachers' responsibility to include if something appears to be "not quite right" with the child, then she has an obligation to inform the parent.

> . . . I think that we are obligated to communicate with parents and try to build up a solid rapport. It is a two-way street. And I think that we have to leave the door open and let parents know what we are doing, and that we are available, and solicit their help. (T10, 281 TFG#2)

> In fact that is what we are doing right now. Every teacher will be sending home a letter to parents with the children . . . [to let parents] know about how the school operates

> and what the expectations are. (T7, 282 TFG#2)
>
> I think I would have to echo what T7 said. My obligation is to teach the children in my classroom the materials that I am obligated to teach them. And the parent piece of that is that I need to be as available as I can be, and we offer several opportunities throughout the year for parents to come. We do send home letters, we do say, "this is when I am available by phone, please feel free to contact me, or leave a message. Here's my e-mail address, if you want it." And if the parent somewhere in the process doesn't feel like they have enough information to do the parent part of the education, then I have an obligation to talk with them. And if I see a part on the kids part that tells me there is something not quite right, then I have an obligation also to talk to the parent. (T12, 283 TFG#2)

T3, T5, T7, T10 and T12 clearly believe that it is the teacher's responsibility to communicate with family members and to be available to talk to family members.

Teachers' Views of Family Members' Responsibilities in Relationships with Teachers

The teachers clearly believe that the family members' responsibilities are to be involved with their children's learning, to be proactive in communicating with teachers, and to actively support their children. Some of the teachers' perceptions are influenced by their own experiences as family members with children who have completed middle school.

> I think that they also need to be involved in their child's learning. And what I mean by

> that is to check in once and a while, "What are you doing?" "What are you reading?" "What are you working on?" And being there to give them support, not to do the work for them, and not always to even answer all of their questions, because they need to find some of the answers out, but to be there for support. (T8, 295 TFG#2)

T6 mentions that it is important for family members to go to back-to-school night and conference night.

> I think they [family members] should show up at back-to-school night and conference night. I think it sends a terrible message to the kid [if the family members don't attend school functions]. So, when they [the children] come home and talk about stories . . . "Oh, in the gym today, we did this" at least [the family members] can picture it. (T6, 56 TFG#1)

In the verification statements at the end of the first teacher focus group, the teachers agreed that "coming to parent night and coming to school to meet with the teachers would show the student that they care and would also show the teachers that they care" (H, 436 TFG#1).

T9 perceives that it is the family member's responsibility to contact the teacher if they have a question. "To call when they have a question, or come to my door, you know. But it is their [family members] responsibility" (T9, 290 TFG#2).

In discussing the responsibilities of family members in relationships between teachers and family members some teachers spoke in dual roles, both as teachers and as family members. The teacher's perception of responsibilities of family members is shaded by the teacher's experience, as a family member, dealing with the teachers of their own children.

> As a parent, and as a teacher who deals with parents, I think it is my responsibility as a parent to check in with my children's teachers. You know, "How are things going this year. There are some things that we are hoping that we work on this year, and how is that going?" It is my job [as a family member] to contact the teacher . . . I think that if they [family members] want to do the best they can to help that child at home, they need to be in contact with the teachers of their own child. (T8, 291 TFG#2)

> It is a difficult time. The parent needs to be proactive. But for the parent it is a balancing act, because being proactive and smothering your child are two different things. I agree with T8 that you would like the parents to be proactive. I think it is a very difficult time for parents. If I were to do it all over again with my children, I would do things differently when they were in middle school, than perhaps what I did. I have learned a lot. Too late. (T10, 292 TFG#2)

> I have a child home, too, who is ten. Right now, even, she is pushing for independence, but yet there are times when, as a parent, if you are involved with your child you know that they need your support. And I think that is important that parents are there as a support. (T8, 295 TFG#2)

Teachers indicate that, both as teachers and family members, they see that supporting a middle level child is a balancing act between allowing the child to develop independence and being involved in the child's life.

Teachers' Views of Their Responsibilities in Relationships with Community Members

Teachers believe their responsibility in the relationships with community members is to maintain a welcoming atmosphere at the school for community members. T4 stated, "We definitely should not exude a closed door policy" (T4, 159 TFG#1). T2 perceives that the teachers, responsibility crosses a spectrum from the teacher taking all of the initiative in the relationship to not taking any initiative.

> I think there is a spectrum out there, individually specific, or team specific, it could go anywhere from where you take all of the initiative and it is great, to not taking any initiative, but our arms are open. I think the only perspective that shouldn't exist out there for teachers is that we don't want the community involved; we don't want parents involved. Anywhere else in the spectrum is appropriate. (T2, 154 TFG#1)

T1 agrees with T2's perception of the teachers' responsibility in the relationship can cross a spectrum of involvement with community members. She states

> I would like to revisit the spectrum, because it is true . . . like T2 was saying, one responsibility is to the community, but how many responsibilities do you have as teachers. The meeting ground, I mean there are a billion . . . so you choose what you want to make your priority. For some people that is service learning and for some people it is not. (T1, 166 TFG#1)

T1 believes that teachers have a responsibility to the community. However, she sees it as only one of many responsibilities teachers have. She sees it as a choice the teacher makes regarding what is a priority, not necessarily as responsibility of the teacher.

Teachers' Views of Community Members' Responsibilities in Relationships with Teachers

Teachers indicate that it is the community members' responsibilities are to communicate with the teachers and support the school program. T12 states, "I think there needs to be more communication and a willingness on their part to support the school programs" (T12, 339 TFG#2). T3 states, "I think it would be nice if they were aware of what's going on in school" (T3, 179 TFG#1), and T2 states, "It would be real nice if those coaches place more emphasis on academics" (T2, 145 TFG#1).

T6 suggests that community members' responsibilities include supporting the school program by attending school activities and that the presence of the community members would convey to the students that school is important. He compares the community members' presence at school activities to family member participation in conveying to the student that they care.

> Half of their [the community members] job is done, I think, by their [the community

> members] very presence. And that just says that they are here and that's half the thing right there. You know that when parents come to the back-to-school night conferences . . . the fact that the parents show up, says that they care. If the Little League coach, you know, asks them [the student], "Hey, how did you do in school today?," it's just one little brick in an enormous wall. If at the dinner table, "What did you learn today?," it is just a million of those things that adds up to, oh, school is really important . . . (T6, 177 TFG#1)

Summary

Teachers believe that their responsibility in the relationship with family members is to establish communications. Communication includes building rapport with the families, informing the family members of expectations, and letting family members know how their child is doing in school.

The teachers see the family members' primary responsibility as supporting their children by being involved in the children's education. Family members can support their children by communicating with teachers and attending school activities, which shows both the child and the teachers that the family member cares.

Teachers believe their responsibility is maintaining a welcoming atmosphere for community members. However, some teachers point out that a spectrum of teacher priorities placed on community involvement are reflected in their initiation and maintenance of relationships.

Clearly, these teachers believe that community members have a responsibility to support the school program. Support of the school program can be demonstrated by the community members being aware of what is happening at school, supporting academics, and attending school events.

Teachers' Perceptions of Obstacles to the Development of Partnerships

The findings of teachers' perceptions of obstacles to the development of partnerships are presented in two sections. First, teachers' perceptions of obstacles to the development of partnerships with family members are presented. Second, teachers' perceptions of obstacles to the development of partnerships with community members are presented.

Teachers' Views of Obstacles to the Development of Partnerships with Family Members

In examining the teachers' perceptions of obstacles to the development of partnerships with family members, three themes emerged: (a) teacher workload, (b) family member time, and (c) family member attitude.

The excessive workload that teachers have and lack of time is seen as an obstacle in developing partnerships between teachers and family members and, in addition, is causing conflict between the teachers' roles as a teacher and a family member.

Teachers say that large class sizes make it difficult to have the time to build relationships with families. The Lake School District is encouraging all teachers to contact every family at least twice during the school year. The following exchange that took place in the second teacher focus group points out how class size influences communication and the teachers' concerns regarding the school district's suggestions to encourage communication between teachers and families.

> I keep thinking about . . . we had inservice today and our superintendent spoke with all the staff members. And he charged us to contact every parent at least twice during the school year. And I did not interpret that to mean send a newsletter, or even a report card, but to literally talk to them face-to-face, or by phone call. And in a school where the child has many teachers . . . for each of us to contact, each . . . I mean how many kids do you have during a school year? (T8, 252 TFG#2)
>
> Two hundred a semester. (T9, 253 TFG#2)
>
> Two hundred a semester, so you are talking about 400 kids during the school year. To make 800 calls is not a reasonable thing. But I do think that they have organized instruction in a way, that as a region, as a team . . . we could insure that could happen. (T8, 254 TFG#2)
>
> I think that is what he said. (T7, 255 TFG#2)
>
> Yeah! (T8, 256 TFG#2)

> I thought, oh my gosh, 400 kids and two phone calls, for six teachers [Six teachers in each region]. That would be horrendous. (T7, 257 TFG#2)

T7 and T8 indicate that contacting all of the families of all of their students would be overwhelming for an individual teacher. T7 points out that although the work day is between 8:00 AM and 4:00 PM that "There are none of us who get our work done between 8:00 AM and 4:00 PM" (T7, 324 TFG#2).

As mentioned in the literature review, teachers are also family members and face some of the same obstacles that family members face regarding lack of time. T7 and T10 believe that the time they spend beyond the 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM school day interferes with their role as family members.

> All of us have extensive workloads beyond those work hours which interfere and take away from our time with our families and our children. And there are, I mean I have to tell you that even being here tonight has been a strain on many of us in terms of our families and our workloads, getting ready for school. So, because we give so much on a daily basis, it is hard to give even more in spite of the fact that there is great return. And we know that, and so we do it. But there is great cost to us in terms of our own families as well. (T7, 326 TFG#2)

> Having raised my own family, I can see that is true. I can see with my own kids. There was cost to my own children because of the amount of time that I put in with other people's children. Everything came out fine but if I were to do it again I would rethink, perhaps,

> some of the time that I put in . . . when they were younger. (T10, 327 TFG#2)

Lack of family member time is seen as an obstacle to the development of partnerships by teachers. This aligns with the family members' belief that lack of family member time is an obstacle to the development of partnerships, as discussed in the section on family members' perceptions of obstacles.

Lack of family member time is seen by teachers as being primarily the result of family members working. T3 points out that, "A lot of families, both parents are working and they are locked into these hours and they can't get away" (T3, 101 TFG#1). T4, with almost a decade and a half of teaching experience, sees more family members working now than in the past and feels this has affected family involvement.

> . . . A few years ago . . . if you wanted to do a field trip or a service kind of project and you needed some chaperons, it was no problem to get them. Now it is just like you can't because they have jobs. (T4, 100 TFG#1)

T11 mentions that family members working also influences the interactions that family members have with their children after school.

> . . . I also find . . . [when the children] are in our building and older . . . the parents get jobs. Jobs seem to really cut into their time. Even the activities that they can do with kids after school, reading and so on that you ask them to do, and they

> will write a note back and say that they have been busy working. (T11, 245 TFG#2)

These teachers clearly believe that the lack of family member time is an obstacle to developing a relationship with teachers. Lack of family member time is also seen by T11 and T8 as preventing family members from supporting their children at home.

Just as family members believe the teacher's attitude can be an obstacle to the relationship, teachers see the attitude of some family members as reflected by the family members' behavior as an obstacle to developing relationships. T5 states that family members "dodge my phone calls, or don't come to conference nights . . ." (T5, 14 TFG#1). T2 mentions "lots of information provided by me, in writing, but no reciprocal attempt to try and converse by the parents" (T2, 15 TFG#1).

T3 provides an example of a family member that will not communicate with her.

> I have two kids . . . whose dad changed their home phone number so that the school couldn't get a hold of them. And he kept that phone number but they never answered that phone. And so I talked to the kids and the kids gave me another phone number where I could get a hold of the parent at home in the evening. But he purposely left that one phone number with the school and didn't answer the phone. You know it's like . . . how do you do this? (T3, 52 TFG#1)

These teachers believe that some family members' attitudes present an obstacle to the development of partnerships.

Teachers' Views of Obstacles to the Development of Partnerships with Community Members

In the discussion of the teachers' perception of their relationships with community members, two themes that represent obstacles to the development of partnerships emerged, philosophical differences and lack of communication, have been previously presented. Philosophical differences between teachers and coaches lead to adversarial relationships which may have been exacerbated by a lack of communication.

Teachers do not specifically mention lack of communication between teachers and community members such as Scout leaders and 4H leaders as an obstacle to the development of partnerships. However, if as T9 stated, "I don't see them, I don't know who they are" (T9, 333 TFG#2), communication cannot take place. The lack of communication, or teachers' knowledge of community programs, also is an obstacle to teachers providing assistance to family members who are looking for activities for their children. T8 states

> I have had many parents who have kids in school . . . that would like to know what

> activities we offer for children outside of the school day. What is it that my kid can get involved in? Is there something that they can get into that would be a good, positive influence on them? I have had, I think, a lot of parents ask me that. But I don't have very many things to tell them . . . (T8, 411 TFG#2)

In the statement, T8 refers specifically to activities "we offer," meaning River Middle School. The community does offer programs, but they are not directly sponsored by the school and the lack of a relationship between teachers and community members results in teachers not being aware of the programs. T10 perceives that the lack of central coordination is an obstacle to linking activities together (T10, 341 TFG#2).

Additional themes that emerged as obstacles to the formation of partnerships between teachers and community members are: (a) priorities teachers place on the use of their time as a result of the emphasis by the district and state on test scores[5] and (b) teacher time.

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[5] The test scores refereed to by the teachers are part of the state school reform initiative. Statewide tests in English and mathematics were given during the 1996-1997 school year. A statewide science test will be added during the 1997-1998 school year. Beginning in the 1998-1999 school year, a statewide social sciences test will be added. The students will be expected to explain the importance of civic responsibilities including performing public service by the end of the eighth grade of the 1998-1999 school year. Currently the test scores the teachers refer to only cover English, mathematics and science.

A content analysis of the teacher focus group transcripts reveals that test scores were mentioned 15 times by five different teachers during the teacher focus group discussions. The teachers clearly believe that raising the test scores is the major focus of the district and the State, and as a result has to be the major priority of the teachers. In the second teacher focus group, the following exchange took place:

> . . . Maybe we need to define what education is . . . Maybe there is some education beyond the classroom walls that are valuable for these kids to experience. Right now we are pretty focused. The only thing that we are concerned about right now is test scores. (T10, 341 TFG#2)
>
> The district is clearly sending that message to us. (T7, 342 TFG#2)
>
> Well, [The State Superintendent of Public Instruction] said in her latest statement, "Maybe we need to think about football practice and assemblies that disrupt our academic time." And I think there is a lot of truth to that, but I am afraid that the pendulum is swinging. We've got to get a balance. I am afraid that we are swinging the wrong way. (T10, 343 TFG#2)

The obstacle to partnerships between teachers and community members is not the emphasis on test scores themselves, but the perception that community involvement does not raise test scores. T2 points out

> I think the whole conversation, too, is based on the assumption that we as teachers want to educate a whole kid. We want to have positive relationships with a variety of folks, to see that service to the community is a valuable

> thing. But it comes back to what was said about priorities. Society has set our priorities as test scores, and community involvement doesn't raise test scores. On the surface. (T2, 165 TFG#1)

T10 points out that you cannot quantitatively put the value of after-school activities on paper.

> . . . How do you measure the value? How do you measure after-school activities? I mean how do you quantitatively put it down on paper? You can't! And test scores give you that, it's right there in front of you . . . (T10, 407 TFG#2)

The teachers' belief that achieving high test scores must be their priority and that the effectiveness of after-school activities cannot be measured presents an obstacle to the development of partnerships between teachers and community members.

Several teachers, including T7, believe that the lack of teacher time is an obstacle to the development of partnerships with community members just as it is an obstacle to the development of partnerships with family members. T7 mentions:

> Time. We don't have time . . . All of us are stretched to the absolute max. Every single person in our building is stretched to the absolute max. And there is no one to undertake that [developing partnerships with community members]. (T7, 365 TFG#2)

Summary

The teacher's workload, including class size, is seen by teachers as presenting an obstacle to communicating with family members. In addition, some teachers see the excessive workload interfering with their role as family members. Lack of family member time as a result of family members working is seen by teachers as an obstacle to the development of relationships and also as keeping family members from supporting their children. Some teachers believe that there are family members do not want to communicate with teachers.

Teachers believe that philosophical differences between teachers and coaches, the lack of communication between teachers and community members that results in there not being a relationship, the emphasis by the district and state on test scores, and teacher time all present obstacles to the development of partnership relations between teachers and community members.

Teacher Perceptions Regarding what Would Facilitate Partnership Relations Among the Groups

The findings on teacher perceptions about what would facilitate partnership relations among the participant groups are presented in two parts: (a) teacher perceptions regarding what would facilitate partnership relations between middle level teachers and family members and (b) teacher perceptions regarding what would facilitate partnership relations between teachers and community members.

Teachers' Views of what Would Facilitate Partnership Relations with Family Members

Teachers believe that building relationships through informal contacts with family members would facilitate partnerships between teachers and family members. Informal contacts are seen as a way to build a sense of community of which the family members can feel a part. The teachers also indicate that having adequate funding to support activities that provide opportunities for informal contact is needed.

T10 talks about establishing opportunities for informal contacts by establishing a broader base of activities that will provide family members and teachers with increased opportunities for interactions.

> We need to have a broader base. School operates from 8:00 to 4:00. Provide opportunities for children after school, before school, when you can interact and choose to get involved. I think that makes a huge difference. Parents are more comfortable coming in if their child is performing in the orchestra, or their child is in a play, or their child is playing basketball, or their child is just playing intramural basketball. Then you interact with them and it is a very comfortable interaction, as opposed to walking into a classroom where they are somewhat intimidated. (T10, 305 TFG#2)

T1 points out that providing opportunities for family members to participate in their children's activities in a positive way can also help to build relationships.

> . . . If you can bring them [the family members] into the school and have them do things they feel good about and that they are contributing, then maybe they will continue that throughout the middle school years . . . (T2, 80 TFG#1)

T1 gave an example of an activity that she did with her students that involved family members in a positive way.

> Something we did was like a show-and-tell. Each week a different student would be the kid-of-the-week and we would put up pictures or words [about an interest of the child] and at the end of the week the kid would tell about it. Probably a third of my kids had their parents come in. It was fun for the parents; they loved it. And after that they loosened up and I talked to people's parents after that a lot easier, or they talked to me a lot easier than before. (T1, 81 TFG#1)

Meeting the family members in a situation that was fun for the family members facilitated the relationship between T1 and family members. In addition, T4 mentioned activities such as drama and dinner theater as ways to communicate with family members in an informal setting. "I would like to see us continue more of that because that to me is one of the answers, getting the parents into relationships" (T4, 69 TFG#1).

Furthermore, T2 would like to see the school as a community center.

> I think that would help if the school were not so much a school but more community center where a family feels part of it. But that can't be . . . point the finger at the lack of money and no funds for athletics. (T2, 70 TFG#1)

T2 believes that if the school was more of a community center the family members would feel more of a part of it but he also points out that the lack of funding prevents it from happening.

The lack of funding is also cited by T7 as the reason for the elimination of after-school activities, which occurred six years ago when River switched from a junior high school to a middle school. When asked why after-school activities were stopped, T7 replied, "It was the funding issue" (T7, 312 TFG#2). T12, T7, and T10 all taught at River when it was a junior high school. T12 feels that the activities that they had as a junior high school facilitated the relationships between families and teachers. She states that loss of team feeling/support has resulted in a

> Lack in pride, or even as a community in our school, because you don't have a lot of team get together . . . a bond did develop [between teachers and family members] and they [family members] did feel more comfortable, I think, knowing that if they saw you in a different setting they would feel okay to walk into your room, or to give you a call more so. (T12, 315 TFG#2)

T10 believes that teachers and schools limit what they can do for economic reasons. He also sees that this limits the teachers' opportunities to interact with family members, the community, and the children.

> But we limit ourselves in how we can contact people for economic reasons. We run an 8:00 to 4:00 day and we don't provide the format to contact parents beyond that 8:00 to 4:00 day. We don't run after-school activities. A lot of the contacts in the past, we've contacted parents informally, at plays. T9 is a drama teacher and he will have a lot of parent contact, because he is contacting parents at a little different level and a little different setting. We've eliminated a lot of those settings. When a lot of our parent contacts used to occur, they don't occur anymore, because at 4:00 people go home, they don't stay. So, we sort of limit our opportunities to interact with our community because we sort of limit how we interact with our children. We interact with them on an academic level; we don't interact with them in many other areas. And that is sad. (T10, 258 TFG#2)

Teachers' Views of what Would Facilitate Partnership Relations with Community Members

Teachers believe that support and coordination of after-school and volunteer programs would help to facilitate relationships. T8 believes that community members who come to the school need support and that there has to be someone from the school other than the teacher to be reaching out to the community.

> There has to be more scaffolding in place to support people to come into the school to do things so that it is a successful

> relationship, and for the school to have someone to be reaching out to the community so that can be successful. It just can't fall into the lap of the person who is supposed to be doing all of the educating. (T8, 372 TFG#2)

This perception is shared by T10 who states

> You need to provide support structures for the faculty. But those support structures have to be provided by the district. It can't be provided by the building because it takes away from your FTE and it raises class size . . . originally when the middle school was first constructed, there was an individual who was responsible for service learning, to help build these bridges. There was a secretary who helped at one time to do this--community relations. And I think that without those kinds of support things, it goes back on the back of the teacher and the teacher doesn't have time to build these bridges and create these relationships. I don't think it can be done unless the structure changes. (T10, 367 TFG#2)

T7 points out that to have the support needed to facilitate relationships with community members, more money is needed.

> . . . There is not enough money to hire as many adults as we need to run the caliber of program that we aspire to. And we have very high expectations. We do amazing things. We could do that better if we had more teachers, but that is more money; and the after-school athletic programs, that is more money; and more teacher time. And those are the issues. (T7, 376 TFG#2)

Some type of central coordination to link the school and the community together would help facilitate partnership relations according to T10. He mentions that the school at one time provided the coordination.

> There is no central coordination. Everybody is doing their own thing. There are a lot of little entities out there doing their own thing, but nothing tying them together. At one time the school tied everything together. The school was the central link, but now there is not linkage. I think in other communities, like in Brook, they have a recreation district . . . And so that provides a linkage between everything. That helps. Lake doesn't have that. Lake has just gone piecemeal. (T10, 341 TFG#2)

The school is not necessarily perceived by T10 as being the only organization that can coordinate programs. Brook, the neighboring community he refers to, has an extensive parks and recreation program that coordinates and provides community activities.

Summary

The teachers clearly see that establishing contact with family members in informal settings would facilitate teacher and family member partnerships. Teachers also strongly believe that funding and support are needed to provide opportunities for activities to occur that provide informal settings that promote the development of partnerships. Support by the district in the form of personnel to reach out to the community is perceived as a way to facilitate partnerships.

Chapter Summary

In discussing teachers' perceptions regarding working with family members to benefit middle level children, two major themes emerged whether teachers were relating to family or community members: (a) issues dealing with communication, and (b) the lack of teacher and family member time. In addition, value conflicts between the "larger" community and teachers and between some community members and teachers emerged as an issue in the teacher/community member relationship. A summary of teachers' perceptions about working with family members is presented first followed by teachers perceptions regarding working with community members.

Teachers believe that they have good or very good relationships with most of the family members of their students. However, there are also indications of frustration and the possibility of bad relationships with family members who do not communicate with the teachers.

Issues dealing with lack of communication emerged in the discussion of the relationship between teachers and family members, responsibilities in the relationship, obstacles to partnerships, and the facilitation of partnerships. Teachers believe that it would be helpful if the family members were more active in communicating with them. The teachers also believe that it is the teachers' responsibility to establish communication with family members.

Lack of family member time and excessive teacher workloads that result in a lack of teacher time are seen as obstacles to the development of partnerships. However, the teachers also indicate that providing opportunities for informal interactions with family members by would facilitate relationships. This apparent contradiction may denote a difference between what teachers see as doable versus what they see as desirable. Funding and support are needed for the teachers to do all the things they think they should.

In addition, teachers believe that family members have the responsibility of supporting their child and being involved in their child's life. Family members can demonstrate support for their child by attending school functions, helping their child at home, and communicating with their child's teachers.

Teachers clearly believe that there is a need for improved communication between teachers and community members. In discussing their relationships with community members such as 4-H leaders and Boy Scout leaders, teachers indicate that there is no interaction and therefore no relationship and little communication.

Communicating with teachers is seen by the teachers as being the responsibility of community members.

Furthermore, lack of teacher time and the need for increased resources to support activities are areas of concern for teachers. Teachers believe that their time and energy should be focused on test scores rather than on building relationships with community members. Teachers also indicate that central coordination--provided by the community or the school district--and increased support by the district to hire someone to reach out to the community would help build relationships.

Finally, value conflicts between teachers and community members emerged in two areas. First, teachers believe that the larger community, and corporate America in particular, are communicating standards both to children and family members that are in conflict with the standards of the teachers and the school. Second, there are value conflicts between teachers and some coaches.

The matrix in Appendix E shows a summary of the findings presented in Chapters IV, V, and VI of family members', community members', and teachers' responses to the four questions: (a) What are your relationships with the other groups?, (b) How do the groups view responsibilities in the relationships?, (c) What are the obstacles to the development of relationships among the groups?, and (d) What facilitates partnership relations among the groups to benefit middle level children?

Analysis of the findings, including emerging themes and topics that appear to influence the participants' perceptions of their roles and others roles are presented in Chapter VII.

CHAPTER VII

ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

The six focus groups produced a wealth of information illuminating how family members, community members, and teachers view their role in working with each other to benefit middle level children's healthy development. Three areas that shape the participants' perceptions of their roles in working together emerged from the data: Factors that influence the development of relationships between family members, community members, and teachers, and two problematic areas which need to be negotiated to improve the relationship--lack of communication, and value conflicts. Value conflicts occur between members of the child's mesosystem (family members, community members, and teachers) and influences on the child from the child's microsystem (television and the Internet).

Influences on the Development of Relationships Between Family Members, Community Members, and Teachers

A major issue that emerged in the focus group discussions involved the perspectives of the relationships among each participant group. The perspectives voiced by the members of the groups provide insights into how they perceive their roles in working with each other and how they view their own and others' responsibilities in the relationships. Before turning to the influences that shape the relationships, I frame the analysis with a discussion of the characteristics of relationships.

The term "relationship" implies that there is an association that continues over a period of time and that the parties in the association are linked together by a relatively stable set of expectations (Vander Zanden, 1996, p. 101).

Relationships among individuals are bound together by two different degrees of interactions (Olmsted, 1959): expressive ties and instrumental ties. On the one hand, expressive ties link individuals in interactions that are close and personal which usually occur in primary groups where intimate, cohesive relationships exist. On the other hand, instrumental ties link individuals in interactions in which people work together to achieve a goal without giving the relationship itself any larger significance. Instrumental ties are typically found in secondary groups where individuals or groups interact to achieve a specific goal. Anderson and Carter (1990) add that if the parties of the relationship "react to each other more as role occupants than as persons, it is a secondary group" (p. 136).

Relationships can be described as having a quality. A "good" relationship describes interactions either among individuals or groups that the individual or group finds satisfying. In a primary group relationship, satisfaction grows from having the participant's emotional needs met. The relationship itself is perceived as valuable in its own right (Vander Zanden, 1996).

In a secondary group relationship, satisfaction is based on the participants' perception that the goals of the individual or group are being met (Vander Zanden, 1996). In relationships among different groups, if the goals of the groups in the relationship differ, or if the groups are in competition with each other, the relationship among the groups may be described by the participants as "bad" or "adversarial."

Boissevain (1974) described relationships as being influenced by the participants' frequency of interactions, the duration of the relationship, and the intensity of the relationship. The context of the relationship influences the frequency, duration, and intensity of the relationship as well as the ties in the relationships--expressive ties in primary relationships and instrumental ties in secondary relationships. These factors (frequency, duration, and intensity) combine to shape the person's perspective of his or her own and others' roles and responsibilities in the relationship.

The symbolic interactionist perspective postulates that actions are mediated by the interpretation people give their life in interacting with others (Blumer, 1969). This is a formative process of continual assimilation and accommodation in which people are making "indications to one another and interpreting each other's indications" (p. 50). The individual's interpretation of a situation and his or her own and others' roles in it combine to form the individual's perception of relationships between individuals and groups.

Table 20 presents an overview of the degrees of interactions, the perceptions of the characteristics, and quality of the relationships among the participant groups.

Influences that affect the development of relationships between family members, community members, and teachers are presented in three parts: (a) the influence of the context of the activity on the relationships, (b) expectations in the relationships, roles and responsibilities and (c) lack of time and placement of priorities.

Table 20

Perceptions of the Relationships Between Family Members, Community Members, and Teachers

	Family M -> Teachers	Teachers -> Family M	Community M -> Family M	Family M -> Community M	Community M -> Teachers	Teachers -> Community M
DEGREES OF INTERACTIONS	Instrumental ties-secondary relationships; Would like opportunities for informal interactions	Instrumental ties-secondary relationships; Would like opportunities for informal interactions	Shaped by context: Expressive ties--primary relationships with church group/ scouts; Instrumental with others	Shaped by context: Expressive ties-primary relationships with scouts/sports for some; Instrumental for others	Little interaction: Secondary relationships	Shaped by context: Service Learning-Instrumental ties Others little interaction
PERCEPTIONS OF THE QUALITY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF RELATIONSHIPS	Good	Good to very good with most family M Bad with family M who do not communicate	Shaped by context: With Scout & church group families=good 4-H mixed Service Learning poor to good with active families Sports = negative baby sitting service	More relaxed than with teachers Intense with some coaches	Shaped by context: Community members who are not coaches = no relationship Service Learning = some good Coach = many teachers do not care; however it runs the gamut; Some great T, some poor T	Shaped by context: Service learning partners = good Coaches = adversarial 4-H, Scouting = no relationship

Influence of the Context of the Activity on Relationships

The context of relationships appears to influence the participants' frequency of interactions, the duration of the relationship, and the intensity of the relations. As shown in Table 20, teachers' perceptions of their relationships with community members depends on the context of the community activity being discussed. Teachers involved with community members participating in service learning projects actively involving teachers are described as "good." However, teachers see their relationships with coaches who are not directly associated with the school as adversarial and having limited interactions. Relationships of teachers with community members who work with children through 4-H and Scouting are described as "nonexistent." Community members appear to share the teachers' perceptions of relationships among the groups.

The teacher's perceptions of "community members" appear to be focused on community members who volunteer at the school or who are directly involved with the school through formal service learning projects. Those are the community members teachers see and with whom they interact. Perhaps as a result of limited interactions, there appears to be little recognition of community members who actually work with middle level children outside the sphere of the school in the minds of the teachers. Nevertheless, 71.3% of eighth grade students participate in extracurricular activities as shown in Table 1, and community members who work with children in those activities appear to play an important role in the children's healthy development.

It is interesting to note that some community groups such as Girls Scouts and Boy Scouts are doing the same type of service learning projects as the schools. C1, who in the past has worked with teachers through service learning projects at her agency, indicates that because of budget cuts, teachers are not able to bring children to her agency as frequently as they once did. She points out that now she deals more with Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts who do community service (C1, 24). This is an example of community groups providing learning activities for children that were previously provided by the school. When teachers do not realize that community groups are doing service learning projects, they may miss opportunities to tie the experiences to their curriculum. Thus, they lose the opportunity of making the experience more meaningful for children.

In discussing their relationships with each other, both teachers and community members who work with middle level children, such as 4-H leaders and Scout leaders, indicated that they did not have a relationship with each other. However, both teachers and community members do have expectations for each other as members of groups, and suggestions for improving the relationship and assigning responsibilities to the members of the groups. This would indicate that the groups have a relationship using Vander Zanden's (1996) definition. Thus, while individual members of the groups may not perceive that they have a relationship, there appears to be a mental model of a relationship among groups in the minds of the teachers and community members.

The perception of a lack of a relationship between two of the groups in the child's mesosystem, community members and teachers, influences the third group in the child's mesosystem, the family members. The difficulty encountered by family members in finding extracurricular activities for children was mentioned in the family focus group session, and the lack of teacher knowledge regarding the availability of programs was mentioned in both the teacher and community member focus groups. As F3 (31 FFG#1) pointed out, it is a lot of work for family members to find extracurricular activities for children. C3 (74) mentioned that he believes teachers are not aware of community programs, and if they are aware they do not know how to contact the groups. C3's perception is confirmed by T8 (411 TFG#2), who indicates that many family members request information for extracurricular activities from her. However, as a teacher, she does not know what is available and thus cannot help family members looking for activities for their children.

Furthermore, just as the context of the activity influences the relationship between teachers and community members, so does it influence the relationship between community members and family members as shown in Table 20. F2 characterizes his relationship with some community members, specifically Scout leaders and some coaches, as primary relationships including social activities (F4, 271 FFG#1). These are relationships of long duration and with frequent interactions. However, F14 (489 FFG#3) and F7 (264 FFG#2) describe their relationships with coaches as "intense," and indicate that sometimes coaches become too "serious."

In addition, community members indicate that there is a continuum of relationships between community members and family members. Community members made distinctions between the context of activity and the type of relationship. Community members involved with church groups and Boy Scouts appear to have close personal ties with family members (C4, 100; C2, 98). This may be the result of a common ideology (shared values) between family members and the community volunteers involved in the activities. C2 distinguishes between the relationship she has with family members with children in the church group as opposed to family members whose children are involved in the 4-H group she leads. She indicates that church group family members are actively involved with the group, but 4-H family members do not appear to desire a relationship. Her interactions with 4-H families are of a shorter duration and less frequent than those with church group families.

Expectations in the Relationships: Roles and Responsibilities

The term relationship implies that the parties in the association are linked together by a relatively stable set of expectations (Vander Zanden, 1996). Community members clearly do not expect teachers to be involved to a large extent with community programs, but they do believe that teachers should be aware of what programs are available. C2 mentions that there is only so much that teachers can do (C2, 85), and C3 believes that teachers have to depend on groups outside of the school to support children in different aspects of their lives (C3, 37). Nevertheless, in discussing responsibilities in the relationship, community members clearly believe that the teachers have responsibility to provide to families and children information regarding community programs (C4, 79). Conversely, some teachers believe that community members have a responsibility to support school programs by attending school activities (T6, 177 TFG#1) and being aware of what is happening at school (T3, 179 TFG#1; T2, 145 TFG#1). T6 suggests that community members' responsibilities include supporting the school program by attending school activities and that the presence of the community members would convey to the students the message that school is important. He compares the community members' presence at school activities to family members' participation in conveying to the student that they care.

> Half of their [the community members'] job is done, I think, by their [the community members] very presence. And that just says that they are here and that's half the thing right there. You know that when parents come to the back-to-school night conferences . . . the fact that the parents show up, says that they care. If the Little League coach, you know, asks them [the student], "Hey, how did you do in school today?," it's just one little brick in an enormous wall. If at the dinner table, "What did you learn today?," it is just a million of those things that add up to oh, school is really important . . . (T6, 177 TFG#1)

Although teachers believe that community members should attend and support school activities, they do not appear to believe that they as teachers have a responsibility to reciprocate by attending and supporting community activities.

Perceptions of Time and Priorities

Relationships are influenced by the amount of time (frequency of interactions) the participants have to develop the relationship. Family members, community members, and teachers all indicate that lack of time for teachers and family members is an obstacle to the development of relationships. Research by Dauber and Epstein (1993) and Moles (1993) indicates the lack of family member time is an obstacle to family involvement at school. Moles (1993) and Steinberger (1992) both reported that the lack of teacher time influences the development of family member/teacher relationships. In this study, it became clear that participants' perceptions about lack of time are influenced by their priorities for how time is used. The discussion of time and priorities is presented in three parts: (a) family members' difficulties in "finding time," (b) the limits of teachers' time, and (c) priorities in using time.

Family members' difficulties in "finding time." Some family members indicate that lack of time prevents them from being involved at school and with the community activities in which their children participate. Work obligations, responsibilities to other family members, and being overwhelmed by life's challenges and circumstances emerged as factors that contribute to the lack of family member time for involvement. Family members who are able to be actively involved at the middle school express empathy for those family members who cannot participate. F15 (481 FFG#3) points out that some family members have work obligations or other reasons over which the family members have no control for not being involved.

As a result, family members who are not involved with the school appear to have more difficulty communicating with teachers and appear not to be aware of what is happening at school. F12 (462 FFG#3), who never volunteers at school, indicated that she works full-time and has a lot of stress in her life. As a result, F12 was not able to "keep on top" of what was happening with her child who was having difficulty at school. She was not aware of weekly notes coming to her from the teacher. "I did not even know that he was bringing home something every week" (T12, 462 FFG#3). Clearly, communication links with the teacher suffered, her child was not made accountable for his actions, and the family member was not aware that her child was having difficulty at school.

In addition, community members agree that family members who work long hours face difficulties in finding the time to be involved with the extracurricular activities in which their children participate. C3 and C5 mentioned that for some family members it may be very difficult to be involved. Nevertheless, community members believe that family members have a responsibility to find the time to support community programs and their children.

> . . . They should be involved to a certain extent in order just to know what kids are being exposed to . . . And I realize for some parents that is very difficult, especially for a lot of parents that work long hours and stuff like that--it is very difficult for them to get involved. They can even get involved peripherally just by asking/talking to the kids about, "How was your day today?" You know? "You went to your Scout meeting . . . what went on with that?" (C3, 107)

C3 indicates that the degree of involvement does not have to be extensive. For family members who lack time, even peripheral involvement would help family members be aware of what is happening in the programs in which their children are involved.

Teacher time--too many students, not enough support. Family members, community members, and teachers all agree that lack of teacher time is an obstacle to developing relationships. Family members in all three focus groups mentioned that lack of teacher time was seen as the result of too many students in the classroom and the requirement of too much paperwork from the district and the State.

Overlarge class size is seen by family members as overwhelming the teachers and making it difficult for teachers to establish relationships with the families of their students. F6 pointed out:

> The sheer number alone has got to be tremendous. I mean to try to contact every parent that you [the teachers] need to; there is just not enough time to do that. (F6, 248 FFG#2)

Similarly, these perceptions are shared by teachers who point out that contacting every family member of their students would be an overwhelming task for a teacher. The district is asking all teachers to contact all family members twice a year. T7 stated that when she heard about the school district's request, she thought:

> Oh my gosh, 400 kids and two phone calls, for six teachers [in each region]. That would be horrendous. (T7, 257 TFG#2)

As pointed out in the review of the literature, teachers are human beings who also have roles as family members and face some of the same difficulties as the families they serve (Moles, 1993). Teachers have stress in their lives and challenges to face. Two of the teachers participating in the focus group sessions have children who have dropped out of school, which is extremely stressful for family members. Others indicate that the time they spend beyond their work hours limits their time with their own families and children.

> All of us have extensive workloads beyond those work hours which interfere and take away from our time with our families and our children . . . I have to tell you that even being here tonight [at the focus group session] has been a strain on many of us in terms of our families and our workloads. So, because we give so much on a daily basis, it is hard to give even more in spite of the fact that there is great return.

> And we know that, and so we do it. But there is great cost to us in terms of our own families as well. (T7, 326 TFG#2)

> Having raised my own family, I can see that is true. I can see with my own kids. There was cost to my own children because of the amount of time that I put in with other people's children. Everything came out fine but if I were to do it again I would rethink, perhaps, some of the time that I put in . . . when they were younger. (T10, 327 TFG#2)

The lack of time as a result of extensive workloads that require teachers to work beyond their 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM work day clearly interferes with T7 and T10's roles as family members. Consequently, both T7 and T10 indicate that their own families and children have suffered.

In addition, community members agree that teachers have heavy workloads and that lack of time is a factor which limits teachers' ability to meet the needs of all children.

> Well, there is a limit to how much they [teachers] can involve themselves with any one given student, especially the middle school . . . It is just a time constraint. I mean, you [teachers] don't have time to touch base with every child. Teachers have to depend on other groups outside of school to make sure that their children's well-being is being supported by different aspects of what their life is involved with. Not necessarily that teachers have to be involved to a huge extent. (C3, 37)

C3 believes that community programs can compensate for the lack of time teachers have to meet the needs of all children.

The lack of time for family members and teachers to work together in partnerships and support children in community activities is clearly an obstacle to developing relationships. It is interesting to note that all three participant groups see the lack of time of both family members and teachers as problematic. However, none of the groups indicate that lack of time by community members as an issue. This may be related to the priorities placed on the use of time by the various groups as discussed in the next section.

Uses of time--the placement of priorities. Priorities for the use of limited time appear to be an issue for family members and teachers in terms of their frequency of interactions with community members and each other. Family members indicate that work obligations and their own needs as human beings may sometimes take priority over being involved at school and with community activities. F11 mentioned that, "You know, sometimes it is just a matter of what you can fit into your schedule and into your life" (F11, 502 FFG#3). Similarly, F3 indicates that adult family members also have needs and the children's needs cannot always take priority.

> It is a lot of work for a parent to maintain this level of involvement in every aspect of their kids' lives . . . We have been talking about the kids, but wait-a-minute, you know as parents we have needs and we can't all have a big red "S" on our chest. (F3, 159 FFG#1)

Teachers clearly do not believe that spending time developing relationships with community members is a major responsibility of their job. Although they believe that they should maintain a welcoming atmosphere at the school for community members, they see their involvement with community members as only one of many responsibilities teachers have. The teachers believe their involvement can cross a spectrum from being very involved to not being involved at all. T2, in referring to this spectrum of involvement pointed out that one responsibility is to the community, but that they have many other responsibilities and a limited amount of time. "So you choose what you want to make your priority. For some people that is service learning and for some people it is not" (T1, 166 TFG#1).

Instead, teachers believe that their major priority is raising the test scores of their students. T2 stated that:

> I think the whole conversation, too, is based on the assumption that we as teachers want to educate a whole kid. We want to have positive relationships with a variety of folks, to see that service to the community is a valuable thing. But it comes back to what was said about priorities. Society has set our priorities as test scores, and community involvement doesn't raise test scores. On the surface. (T2, 165 TFG#1)

T10 points out the difficulty of measuring the value of after-school activities: "How do you quantitatively put it down on paper? You can't. And test scores give you that, it's right there in front of you . . ." (T10, 407 TFG#2). Teachers appear to value community activities for children and desire positive relations with the community; nevertheless, they believe that because of their limited time, their priorities must be on raising test scores and not in developing relationships with community members.

The teachers' assumptions about the inability to quantitatively measure the influence of children's participation in community activities are not supported by the research done by Felner, Jackson et al. (1997). They found that schools with high levels of implementation of *all* eight of The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) recommendations, have higher achievement test scores in mathematics, language, and reading. The recommendations include involving family members in middle schools and connecting schools and communities by using community resources for after-school activities.

The teachers clearly perceive that coordinating partnerships with community members should not be the responsibility of the teacher, but rather the responsibility of the school or district (T8, 372 TFG#2; T10, 367 TFG#2; T7, 376 TFG#2; T5, 189 TFG#1). T8 points out that the school needs to have someone other than the teacher reaching out to the community.

> The school [needs] to have someone to be reaching out to the community so that it can be successful. It just can't fall into the lap of the person who is supposed to be doing all of the educating. (T8, 372 TFG#2)

T10 agrees that support is needed. However, he perceives that the support should be provided at the district level.

> Originally when the middle school was first constructed, there was an individual who was responsible for service learning, to help build these bridges. There was a secretary who helped at one time to do this--community relations. And I think that without those kinds of support things, it goes back on the back of the teacher and the teacher doesn't have time to build these bridges and create these relationships. I don't think it can be done unless the structure changes. (T10, 367 TFG#2)

It is interesting to note that although the teachers do not see involvement with out-of-school activities and developing relationships with community members as a priority of their job, it was an activity engaged in by many of the teachers participating in the focus group. At least four of the teachers are involved with service learning projects, two are involved with a drama program that takes extensive time beyond work hours, one participates in a student exchange program with a rural school district, and one regularly takes students on his own time to participate in enrichment activities at a local university. Others are involved in initiating a student-led conference program and other special activities that involve family members in special activities, both during and after school.

There appears to be a difference between what teachers say should be their responsibility and what they do. Perhaps, as T7 pointed out, the teachers do it because it benefits the children. But they want it to be their professional decision, not something that is seen as a part of their job description.

C6 also addressed the issue of priorities by individuals who perceive that they have no time. Although only addressed by C6, his perspective appears to be important when discussing how the placement of priorities influences the choices people make in using time.

> I am sick of people that say they don't have time. Because they do have time, because whatever their priority is as a parent, as an adult, as a community leader, as a volunteer, as a whatever, everyone has the time, can make the time for some child. (C6, 108)

The choices made by family members, community members, and teachers regarding the degree to which they are involved in relationships with each other, and in supporting children, clearly are dependent on the priority they place on the involvement. When faced with a limited amount of time, difficult choices must be made regarding the priority they place on their time. Consequently, the priorities established by family members and teachers who perceive that they have a limited amount time can become obstacles to the development of relationships.

Summary

The context of the relationship as well as the frequency of interactions, the duration, the intensity, and satisfaction the individual finds in the relationship, shape individuals' perceptions of the quality of relationships. The lack of a well-developed relationship between two groups in the child's mesosystem, teachers and community members, can present an obstacle to another group in the child's mesosystem, the family members. Factors that influence the development of relationships include lack of teacher and family member time, the placement of priorities that influence involvement in relationship, and the perceived roles and responsibilities of the parties in the relationship.

The purpose for developing relationships between family members, community members, and teachers is to form the basis for the establishment of partnerships to support children's healthy development, not just in school but also in life. Two areas that emerged from the data, lack of communication and value conflicts, must be negotiated in order to support children's healthy development. Issues dealing with communication are discussed in the next section.

Communication

The need for improved communication emerged as a major theme in all of the focus group discussions. Family members, community members, and teachers believe that better communication would lead to more productive relationships.

Wood (1982) defined communication as "a dynamic, systemic process in which communicators construct personal meanings through their symbolic interactions" (p. 20). Individual meaning derived from communication is based on the individuals' past experiences and the ways of interpreting others. Communication happens over time and evolves out of previous interactions and earlier encounters.

> As people communicate they learn about each other's values, interests, tendencies for interpreting messages, moods, and so on. Over time people also use symbols to designate common ideas, perceptions, expectations, and rituals. It is communication that allows people to build shared worlds. The greater the shared world, the greater is the probability of communication that is understood by and valuable to the communicators. (p. 29)

Communication is influenced by three dimensions: (a) the focus of communicating which is determined by the personal goals involved in the situation, (b) the environment of the situation, including both the physical setting and the formality or informality of the situation, and (c) the other people involved in communicating, including the relationships among them (Wood, 1989). The more developed the relationship among the people involved in communicating, the more easily they can communicate with each other. Interactions and familiarity allow people to know what to expect from each other and make communication easier and, according to Wood, more satisfying.

The discussion of the participants' perceptions regarding communication is presented in four parts: (a) an overview of the concerns and the perceptions of responsibility regarding communication by each participant group, (b) the reasons for communicating from the perspective of each group, (c) the apparent influence of the frequency of interactions among groups on perceptions of communication, and (d) the influence of the nature of the relationship on communication.

Overview of the Concerns and Perceptions of Responsibilities Regarding Communication by Each Group: Family Members, Community Members, and Teachers

Family members would like more communication with teachers. They believe that both the family members and teachers should initiate contact with each other, and that lack of communication is an obstacle to the development of partnerships among them. Family members also think that community members have a responsibility to communicate with them regarding activities and their child's social development.

At the same time, community members believe that improved communication would facilitate improved relationships with teachers and believe that the lack of communication is an obstacle in their relationships with both teachers and family members. Community members also believe that family members have a responsibility to communicate with them, and the teachers have a responsibility to communicate with both family members and children to provide information about community programs.

Also, teachers would like to change their relationships with community members by having community members communicate with them. At the same time they would like family members to be more proactive in initiating communication with teachers. They also believe it is their own responsibility to establish communication with family members. However, they also think it is the family members' and community members' responsibility to communicate with teachers and see that the lack of communication is an obstacle to their relationships with both family members and community members.

The Perceived Reasons for Communication from the Perspective of Each Group

Clearly, family members, community members, and teachers perceive that the lack of communication is hindering relations with each other. However, different groups appear to have different goals for communication. Table 21 presents the focus of communication between the groups and the perceptions of who is responsible for communication from the perspective of each group.

As shown in Table 21, the focus of communication between family members and teachers and between family members and community members is the individual child rather than programs. In these relationships, there appears to be a desire for actual communication, with both parties in each dyad communicating with a common focus to benefit the child. In addition, both parties in each dyad perceive that they have a responsibility to communicate with each other.

Quite differently, as shown in Table 21, the focus of communication between community members and teachers from the community members' perspectives is at the program level. From the community members' perspective, communication with teachers involves teachers providing information to family members and children about existing opportunities for extracurricular activities.

Table 21

Communication: Focus and Responsibilities

	Family M -> Teachers	Teachers -> Family M	Community M -> Family M	Family M -> Community M	Community M -> Teachers	Teachers -> Community M
Purpose for communicating	The Individual Child	The Individual Child	The Individual Child	The Individual Child	Focus on program level Provide Information to teachers regarding community programs--teachers give information to families and children	Focus on program level Community members be aware of what is happening at school
Responsibilities for initiating communication or providing information	Mutual: Family members and teachers	Mutual: Teachers and family members	Mutual: Community members and family members	Mutual: Family members and community members	Community members, school administration, teachers (Community volunteer should not communicate with teachers regarding an individual child)	Community members, school administration, district level

Furthermore, community members do not believe that they should discuss individual children with teachers. C4 stated:

> . . . I don't think I should involve the school teacher. That is usually something that you don't think about. You may talk to the boys, you may talk to the parents . . . but you never, at least it never enters my life that you should go out and talk to the school teacher . . . (C4, 49)

C4's comments were supported by C5, who pointed out that privacy laws would prevent teachers from discussing individual children with community members.

Conversely, the focus of communication between teachers and community members from the teachers' perspective is for community members to be aware of what is happening at school. In addition, teachers mention that the responsibility for establishing channels of communication is that of the school administration, the district, and the community members, not the teachers.

As pointed out by Wood (1982), communication is dependent upon interactions which provide opportunities for the parties to communicate. The more developed the relationship among the people involved in communicating, the more easily they may communicate with each other. Two themes that emerged from the focus group discussions that influence communication are the frequency of interactions among the groups and the type of relationship among the groups.

The Apparent Influence of the Frequency of Interactions Among Groups on Perceptions of Communication

The actual frequency of interactions, as well as the perceptions of opportunities for interactions, appears to shape participants' perceptions of communication itself. Factors that influence communication are: (a) lack of interactions and perceptions of responsibility between teachers and community members, (b) organizational structure of the school, and (c) frequency of interactions between family members and teachers.

The influence of the lack of interactions and perceptions of responsibility between teachers and community members on communication.

The frequency of interactions and the amount of effort necessary to communicate influences communication between teachers and community members involved in extracurricular activities. Since community members and teachers do not interact frequently, their communication is limited. Although teachers express that they would like better communication with community members involved with extracurricular activities, they appear to see it as the responsibility of the community member to communicate with them and support the school program. T12 states, "I think there needs to be more communication and a willingness on their [the community members'] part to support the school programs" (T12, 339 TFG#2). T3 indicates that the community members need to be aware of what is happening at the school, "If they were just kind of aware that there were activities at school that are important to the kids" (T3, 179 TFG#1).

The amount of effort needed to communicate with community members involved with extracurricular activities also appears to be a factor in communication between teachers and community members. Teachers do not know the community members who work with middle level students during after-school hours. "I don't see them; I don't know who they are" (T9, 333 TFG#2). Thus, to have interactions with community members involved in extracurricular activities, the teachers would have to find out who they are and establish contact. This could require a concerted effort on the teachers' part. T8 indicates that when extracurricular activities such as sports were provided by the school, "within our building," with teachers doing the coaching, it was easier to communicate and avoid conflicts.

> Oftentimes there are community activities that kids are involved with, that you hear, "I didn't get my homework done, because I have youth group on Wednesday," or "I have soccer on Thursday," or "I have this . . . and by the time I get home I am tired." So, I think that sets us up to

> deal in competition for the time of the students that we are dealing with, where at least if that is a program that is within our building we can be aware of that, and the people who are running that program can be aware that this is the last week of the quarter, so let's not schedule four games for that week. Whereas, within the community I don't think that always takes place. (T8, 337 TFG#2)

Here we see a teacher who thinks the lack of communication is a problem. However, she does not indicate that it is her responsibility to communicate with community members involved in extracurricular activities regarding schedules or possible important events happening at school.

Community members see the teachers' responsibilities in communication as "making the children aware of extra opportunities . . ." (C4, 79) not necessarily communicating directly with community members. However, C6 mentions communication difficulties regarding getting information to the teachers as a result of policies established by the school. He perceives that the obstacle to communication is getting information about programs from the school office to the teachers so they can pass it onto family members and children.

> I think part of my problem . . . is getting the information out from the school, not necessarily getting the information into the school, but getting it from. And I will say that about registration forms, a simple registration form for our soccer program. The first thing is that if we wanted to contact every single teacher in school and allow them to pass out information we would not be allowed to do that. Information is given for registration to the office, the office

> says this information is available if your students want it. What teachers take any credence to that? It is just another piece of paper. It is an activity that is incredibly inexpensive . . . yet a lot of kids never know that it exists because it never leaves the office . . . (C6, 71)

The influence of the organizational structure of the school on the frequency of interactions between family members and teachers. As discussed in the review of the literature, the organization and structure of the middle school influences partnerships between family members and teachers (Epstein & Dauber, 1989). The organizational structure of River Middle School appears to influence both the family members' perception of their opportunities for communication with teachers and the teachers' frequency of interactions with family members. Family members indicate that communication was more frequent with teachers in sixth grade self-contained classrooms than with teachers in seventh and eighth grade departmental classes (F15, 392 FFG#3; F4, 194 FFG#2; F11, 414 FFG#3). This perception was shared by family members who volunteer weekly at the middle school, such as F15, and family members who never volunteer such as F4.

> My relationship with my sixth grade teacher was really, really good, and that is because I approached it with the idea like I had when my children were in elementary school . . . and so it has been very good. The seventh grade, because you have so many teachers . . . it is much more difficult. (F15, 392 FFG#3)

> . . . I think there appeared to be interest by teachers [in communicating with family members] in the first year [6th grade], but after the first year, a lot less communication between us and the teachers. (F4, 194 FFG#2)

This perception is verified by the teachers' reported interactions with students' families. Elementary licensed teachers who teach in primarily sixth grade, self-contained classrooms had considerably more interactions with family members than secondary licensed teachers who teach primarily seventh and eighth grade classes. Seventy-five percent of the elementary licensed teachers report interactions with 75% or more of the families of their students compared to only 14.28% of the secondary licensed teachers who report interactions with 75% or more of their students.

The influence of the frequency of interactions between family members and teachers on communication. The frequency of the family members' volunteer involvement at the middle school did not appear to influence their perception that increased communication would improve their relationship with the teachers. Both family members who volunteered weekly, F2 and F15, and those who did not volunteer F4, F8, and F10, felt that increased communication would improve the relationship.

Conversely, family members' perceptions of *opportunities* for communication with teachers appear to be dependent upon the frequency of their involvement at the middle school. Family members who volunteer frequently at the middle school and have established relationships with the teachers appear to be aware of opportunities to communicate with teachers. F9, who volunteers at the middle school more than two times a month, perceives that there are opportunities to communicate with teachers and that the teachers want to communicate with family members. "Teachers are pretty good at trying to get together with you. They really are. They seem to like it when the parents take concern" (F9, 428 FFG#3).

F2, who volunteers weekly at school, pointed out that there are opportunities to communicate with teachers.

> I know that any morning if you call at 8:00 in the morning you will get a teacher on the line . . . It is also happening a couple of periods sometime during the day--for about an hour--the teachers are available. Hopefully they would like to get some work done but they are accessible to parents at that time. So I know that there is plenty of time during the day that I can go over there. (F2, 49 FFG#1)

Even family members who have difficult situations with their children appear to have good relationships with teachers and are able to communicate with teachers if the family member is actively involved at the school. F2, who volunteers at the school one or more times a week and is on the Site Council, expressed that she felt there was a communication breakdown regarding her child.

> . . . We felt that she fell through the cracks. But once everyone was informed I felt that they [the teachers] were accessible and willing to meet our needs, more than willing to meet out needs . . . (F2, 24 FFG#1)

F2 expressed that at first she had a feeling of mistrust for both the teachers and the administration as a result of the situation with her child. However, because she is a member of the Site Council she ". . . was in a position where I could sit and on a weekly basis really hear the hearts of these teachers and the administration and it helped" (F2, 24 FFG#1).

Conversely, family members who are not frequently involved at River Middle School do not appear to be aware of opportunities to communicate with teachers. F10, who never volunteers at the middle school, expressed a desire for "just some regular time that you can see the teacher" (F10, 460 FFG#3). F11, in discussing an unpleasant experience in attempting to communicate with a teacher, stated "[The teacher] never gave us an opportunity . . . to go in and meet with him. It was as if he didn't care . . ." (F11, 436 FFG#3). F11, who only volunteers once or twice a term at River Middle School, clearly felt frustration and resentment as a result of a lack of communication.

In addition, teachers also express frustration in attempting to communicate with family members who they perceive as not wanting to communicate with them. Teachers believe that they have excellent relationships with most family members, and mention several ways that they communicate with family members. However, teachers indicate that despite their attempts to communicate, some family members do not reciprocate by communicating with teachers. Teachers mention experiences, with a sense of frustration, of attempting to reach family members who "dodge my phone calls, or don't come to conference nights" (T5, 14 TFG#1). Teachers also mention sending home weekly reports (T1, 500 TFG#1) and other attempts to provide information to family members. Despite attempts to communicate T2 points out:

> I think . . . my experiences have either been generally positive, oftentimes indifferent, and a couple of times each year negative. Progress reports go out midterm . . . lots of information provided by me, in writing, but no reciprocal attempt to try and converse [by the parents]. (T2, 15 TFG#1)

Clearly, the perceptions of the quality of communications between family members, community members, and teachers are dependent on interactions that provide opportunities for the parties to be talking and listening. The frequency of interactions appears to shape the perceptions of communication held by family members, community members, and teachers. The type of relationship among the parties, which is discussed in the next section, also influences communication.

The Influence of the Type of Relationship on Communication

Perhaps as a result of the frequency of contact and informal nature of the relationship, communication between family members and community members is reported to take less effort than communication between family members and teachers. F8 stated that:

> Well, with sports it is easy to go watch. You can sit in the bleacher and watch what is going on. You don't have to be a direct participant but you can see what your kid does. You are unobtrusive and you can say, "Thank you," to the coach and go on your way. So I think that it is easier to communicate [with community members than teachers]. (F8, 494 FFG#2)

Furthermore, family members indicate that having opportunities to interact with teachers in an informal setting would help to establish a relationship which would improve communications. F7 related an experience as a member of a work party as being "a kind of pseudo team building, if you will . . . Getting to know the teachers in maybe a little less tense environment" (F7, 258 FFG#2). F4 also sees the value of informal contact in a social setting. He related that he was at a school play and he had an opportunity to talk to teachers in an informal manner

> This was a social setting. There may be something to just having a social event, a gathering event, that helps in establishing a relationship. Not because you have an issue, but just to establish a relationship. (F4, 256 FFG#2)

Similarly, teachers believe that building relationships through informal contacts would facilitate communications with family members. Informal contacts are seen as a way to build a sense of community in which family members can feel a part. T10 talks about establishing opportunities for informal contacts by establishing more activities that will provide family members and teachers with increased opportunities for interactions.

> We need to have a broader base. School operates from 8:00 to 4:00. Provide opportunities for children after school, before school, when you can interact and choose to get involved. I think that makes a huge difference. Parents are more comfortable coming in if their child is performing in the orchestra, or their child is in a play, or their child is playing basketball, or their child is just playing intramural basketball. Then you interact with them and it is a very comfortable interaction, as opposed to walking into a classroom where they are somewhat intimidated. (T10, 305 TFG#2)

T2 points out that providing opportunities for family members to participate in their children's activities in a positive way can also help to provide opportunities for interactions (T2, 80 TFG#1). T1 provides an example:

> Something we did was like a show-and-tell. Each week a different student would be the kid-of-the-week and we would put up pictures or words

> [about an interest of the child] and at the end of the week the kid would tell about it. Probably a third of my kids had their parents come in. It was fun for the parents; they loved it. And after that they loosened up and I talked to people's parents after that a lot easier, or they talked to me a lot easier than before. (T1, 81 TFG#1)

Meeting the family members in a situation that was fun for the family members "loosened up" the relationship and communication improved.

Summary

The participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of communication are clearly shaped by the focus of the communication, the environment of the situation (including the formality of the situation), and the degree of the development of the relationship which is influenced by the interactions and familiarity between the parties in the relationship. Improved communication is viewed by all participant groups as a way to better relationships so as to support children's healthy development.

The second area that emerged from the data that must be negotiated in order to support children's healthy development is value conflicts between the participants and the "larger community" and value conflicts between individuals and groups. Issues dealing with value conflicts are discussed in the next section.

The Influence of Value Conflicts Among Members of the Child's Mesosystem (Family Members, Community Members, and Teachers), and Influences on the Child From the Child's Microsystem (Television and the Internet) on Children's Healthy Development and Education

Value conflicts emerged as a major theme in the discussion of the relationships between and among all three groups. In addition, perceptions of value conflicts between the participants and factors in the child's microsystem, particularly television and the Internet, are seen as obstacles to children's healthy development and education by family members, community members, and teachers.

In this study, the term "community members" refers to members of the local community who work with middle-level students at River Middle School. However, in discussing relationships with community members, all three groups--family members, community members, and teachers broadened the definition of community to include their relationship with the "larger community" and society in general. Issues dealing with the society are really beyond the scope of this study. However, in qualitative research themes emerge that are not anticipated by the researcher. The influence of the larger community and of society in general are perceived as obstacles to children's healthy development and education by the focus group participants.

The influence of the larger community is viewed as significant by the participants in the study and, thus, it is included in the discussion.

As pointed out in the definition of community in Chapter I, television and advances in communication technology have blurred the boundaries of communities; yet communities of all kinds are part of a larger social system and the social system is part of the community. As members of the same social system, educational institutions, economic interests, the press, and television cross boundaries of communities and are interdependent (Gist & Fava, 1964). Advances in technology have also blurred the boundaries between the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem. As pointed out in the literature review, I consider television and the Internet to be part of a child's microsystem because their use takes place in the physical space where the child is, and they are activities that the child engages in by herself/himself or with others. However, television and the Internet are also part of the exosystem. Decisions regarding their regulation take place in settings where the children are not present; yet those decisions can influence what the child experiences when watching television or using the Internet. At the same time, decisions regarding their regulation may also occur in the child's mesosystem as adults help determine to what programming children will have access.

The discussion of value conflicts is presented in two parts to reflect the concerns of the participants. First, concerns regarding the values transmitted to children by the media, the Internet, and society in general are discussed. Second, value conflicts among members of the child's mesosystem are discussed. This section concludes with a discussion of finding a common purpose--the sense of community in Lake.

Television, the Internet, and Society in General: Their Influence on Children

Family members, community members, and teachers all are concerned that values which conflict with their own beliefs are being transmitted to their children by television, the Internet, the media, and society in general. They perceive these factors as out of their control, and, as a result, are frustrated by their inability to do anything about them.

The images passed to children by corporate America through television are seen as sending messages to children that "sexualize their behavior" (T5, 533 TFG#1), and harm their self-esteem. T6 mentioned children going into the bathroom and throwing up their food to look thin (T6, 534 TFG#1).

The mass media are also seen as communicating standards to family members that shape family members' beliefs. T2 perceives that standards that are communicated by television to both children and family members are in conflict with the standards of the school.

> The standards that are communicated to kids where they spend a good portion of the time . . . right in front of the television set . . . The parents have bought into much of the assumptions that mass media has told us about things we should be doing. We've all got stories. So I think a lot of blame rests with the culture. (T2, 42 TFG#1)

F3 agrees with T2. She thinks that the violence on television has desensitized both children and adults. T2 sees the danger in this as causing both children and adults to perceive the standards and images presented by television are "normal" behavior.

F3 appeared to be frustrated with her inability to monitor the television that her children watch. She related that, although she tells her children to turn off programs on television, as they become older it becomes harder and harder to monitor (F3, 93 FFG#1). F2 also is concerned with the violence and sexually explicit material on the Internet. She indicates it is difficult to monitor because the children know more about using "high-tech" than the family members do.

> When you get kids that mentally are "natural born killers" and watching that over and over. You put this in the mind of a 6th, 7th, or 8th

> grader . . . boy, they are not developed to handle that. The Internet has more explicit stuff and violence than parents are aware of. They are in a high-tech world and we haven't gotten on board yet. And they know that, too. (F2, 94 FFG#1)

Community members also expressed concern with the values being transmitted to children. They did not specifically mention the media or the Internet, but they are very concerned about children being exposed to issues that in the past they were not exposed to until they were older. For instance C3 states, "It is just amazing what they are being exposed to at such an early [age]" (C3, 54). C3 pointed out:

> I mean there are some junior high girls out there that are pregnant now . . . . And this breaks my heart, but, you know, it is just like issues that are just unbelievable . . . that we would have never thought about until after high schools. These kids are just being subjected to this earlier-and-earlier. (C2, 62)

The trickle down effect of social problems is also of concern to F2. This family member with two children who are now adults refers to the changes in the middle school and society during the five years since her older children completed middle school.

> It is so dangerous out there for middle school kids. It is a different world. Coming back as a parent of middle school kids after five years I have spent a lot of time with administration saying how has it has changed. It is just a dangerous world. They [middle level children] are harder. They are more worldly-wise. They are exposed to so much more. Fourteen-year-olds are on the street now . . . That didn't use to

> happen until they were juniors in high school. (F2, 88 FFG#1)

Family members, community members, and teachers appear to see the issues presented by the media and society in general as almost overwhelming. They perceive that the values presented by the media and society conflict with their values and appear to be frustrated by their inability to do anything about it. However, T7 believes that the school has a responsibility to address the issues presented by society but in doing so creates an environment that contrasts with the other environments in the children's lives.

> I have been struck much in the last few years at how the society that we create in our schools, and very carefully create, is in many ways completely in contrast to what these children experience in every other part of their life. And, yet, I don't think that we cannot do that. I don't think that we can accept what is happening in society as being normal and appropriate, but it strikes me how often school is such a totally different, almost unreal, environment for some of these kids. Because it is a place where you can be treated nicely, you can have respect, where, you know, you don't get beat up. And where there is a sense of right and wrong, and caring for each other. That is a strange thing to feel that you are sort of a little island. (T7, 287 TFG#2)

Value Conflicts Among Members of the Child's Mesosystem

Value conflicts emerged in discussions of the family member/community member relationship and the community member/teacher relationship. These value conflicts appear to be based on how individuals in the child's mesosystem view the purposes for the child's participation in an activity.

Both family members and community members indicated that the goal of extra-curricular activities should be for the child to have fun and a positive experience. However, both also indicate that the modeling done by coaches and other family members can interfere with the child having fun. Some say they model behavior that conflicts with their family's values. F5 mentions that she has a ". . . Sense that the coach is going to make a mean machine out of my kid, and I really don't want a mean machine for a kid" (F5, 287 FFG#2). F7, F11, F3, and F15 all mentioned value conflicts and inappropriate modeling by coaches as presenting obstacles to the development of relationships. In addition, F7 indicated that modeling done by family members may not be appropriate and that

> Some of the coaches can be pretty intense and some of the parents can get even more intense . . . So you've got to kind of watch that if things are getting out of hand, a little too serious . . . (F7, 264 FFG#2)

Community members perceive that one of their major responsibilities is to be a positive role model. For C1, being a positive role model is seen as overcoming some of the negative influences presented to children at home.

". . . If you can be that role model for them, it makes it a little easier for them to go home and deal with what they have" (C1, 130).

In addition, teachers indicate that value conflicts specifically between teachers and the philosophies demonstrated in sports activities present obstacles to developing relationships. T10 and T12 used the term "adversarial" in discussing their relationship with community sports programs. T10 mentioned that the philosophies exhibited in some sports programs are counterproductive to his values. He sees some as being ". . . win-focused, very narrow focused, an elitist-type organization" (T10, 336 TFG#2). Because of the differing philosophies, he does not believe that the school presents a welcoming environment. For C6, a coach, perhaps as a result of the attitude exhibited by the teachers, he believes that a lot of teachers do not really care about sports programs (C6, 28).

Furthermore, community members believe that the values supported by some of their programs conflict with legal requirements that the schools must enforce. This was addressed by community members as being the result of the constitutional separation of the church and state. C4 related how the issue of religion is also an obstacle between the Boy Scouts and schools developing partnerships.

> How do you get teachers to indicate, you know, the Boy Scout movement, when the Boy Scout movement has religious beliefs . . . duty to God . . . it is there. It is not going to change. There is some conflict. (C4, 77)

T12 (speaking as the wife of a husband who works with children through a church group) mentioned that her husband had difficulty getting into schools to work with children.

> . . . My husband works with youth in the community through a church . . . A great deal of what he sees as his role with kids, is . . . what I see as my role with kids: To help kids have the tools they need to function in society, to make smart choices, to make healthy choices, and those are the kinds of things that he does, extensively with kids . . . He has tried to find opportunities to meet with kids and eat lunch with them, or bring them a McDonalds, just to be an adult that is there, that's supportive, to go to sporting events. The response from school has not been very open . . . From his perspective he hasn't had a great deal of success being able to get in. He is the sort or person that if he has a kid that isn't succeeding, whose parent isn't doing anything and isn't involved, he would go and talk with the teacher with the kid. He would talk about how he could help the kid succeed, but the opportunity to do that isn't there as a community adult that is willing. And he works with a team of adults who work with 60 or 75 kids who are disadvantaged, and there just isn't a place for that. (T12, 334 TFG#2)

T12 clearly perceives that her husband's role with a church group and her role as a teacher are the same--to support children's healthy development. Yet, she implies that concerned adults associated with a religious group may not be well accepted by school personnel because of the religious affiliation.

Finding a Common Purpose: Perspectives of a Sense of Community in Lake

The concept of community spirit, having a sense of membership in a common community, is mentioned by C4 and C3 as an important aspect in supporting the development of relationships. Although only addressed by C4 and C3, this appears to be a substantive issue in the relationships between the groups. All of the groups have a goal of supporting middle level children, but they do not appear to share a sense of community and supportive action for each other in working with children. For example, C4 compared a small town that he lived in on the east coast to Lake.

> On the east coast we were living in a small town with much more community. And we had a lot of feedback from a lot of people. You actually got feedback. There is a sense of community and community spirit and supportive action for much of what was happening in the community itself. So, yeah, if you were teaching in the community you knew what was going on. You knew you had Scout troops, you knew you had Cub packs, and they actually invited you into the schools. Whereas, now, in Lake I feel a reluctance to do that. It is a fight sometimes. So, I think . . . it's a coming together, there is an awareness of community sense, community spirit. If somehow those mechanisms for community--for portions of the community to get together just to discuss the issues and problems that are

> arising, then I think that would provide some valuable insight into what is happening with some of the teenagers today . . . (C4 72)

C4 clearly perceives that a sense of community and community spirit is missing in Lake. C3 also related his experience to living in a small town where teachers were members of the community and were aware of what was happening in the community.

> Maybe if there were some kind of connection, even on an informal basis between the teachers and whatever. I grew up in a small town and all the teachers were members of all the churches that were in town, which means that they knew. about all of the stuff that was going on. They knew about Scout groups, they knew about the youth groups, everything like that, which means it was a little easier for them because they were involved with the groups themselves in their own volunteer basis. But in larger communities it is a little bit more difficult, in that some of the teachers don't even live in the area where their teaching is. It is difficult for them to understand any of the community things that are available . . . . If there was some way for the teachers to have some frame of reference to where they knew about all of the activities that were going on, and maybe that might stimulate some kind of response. (C3 74)

Only one teacher participating in the focus group sessions indicated that she lived in Lake. The findings of the family member, community member and teacher focus group sessions appear to support the perceptions of C4 and C3 that Lake does not have a sense of a common community, and, as a result, relationships between community members and teachers are not well developed. This lack of connection and community hinders family members, community members, and teachers in working together to support the healthy development of children.

Chapter Summary

Participants' views of their role working with each other are shaped by factors that influence the degree of the development of the relationship. In addition, two problematic areas need to be negotiated to improve the relationship--lack of communication and value conflicts.

Factors that influence the development of relationships include lack of teacher and family member time, the placement of priorities that influence involvement in relationship, and the perceived roles and responsibilities of the parties in the relationship.

The context of the activity also appears to contribute to the degree of the development of the relationship. The context influences the frequency of interactions, the duration of the relationship, and the intensity of the relations. There is a wide spectrum of degrees of development of relationships and apparent satisfaction in the relationships depending on the context. Family members indicate that their relationship with teachers is generally good to very good. In addition, teachers report generally good relationships with family members with whom they have interactions. However, relationships between teachers and community members who have little interaction are described as "adversarial" or as "nonexistent." The amount of time people have and the priorities placed on the use of time influence the frequency of interactions.

In addition, obstacles presented by a lack of communication between the participants are seen as hindering the development of relationships. The participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of communication are clearly shaped by the focus of the communication, the environment of the situation including the formality of the situation, and the degree of the development of the relationship which is influenced by the interactions and familiarity between the parties in the relationship. Improved communication is viewed by all participant groups as a way to better relationships so as to support children's healthy development.

Finally, value conflicts among the participants make the development of relationships problematic. Family members, community members, and teachers all are concerned that values which conflict with their own beliefs are being transmitted to children by television, the Internet, the media, and society in general. They perceive these factors as out of their control and are frustrated by their inability to do anything about them. It is suggested that the development of a sense of membership in a common community and engaging in supportive action for each other would better serve children.

Conclusions and recommendations based on the findings, and suggestions for further research are presented in Chapter VIII.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the interrelationships between and among family members, community members, and middle level teachers from the perspectives of these participants. This study views all three groups as integral members, with equal standing, in a complex ecological system, the purpose of which is to support early adolescents' academic achievement and healthy development throughout school and life.

This chapter presents and discusses the conclusions of the study, which was guided by two primary research questions: (a) What are the perceptions of family members, community members, and teachers regarding their current roles working with each other to benefit middle level students? and (b) What are the perception of family members, community members, and teachers regarding what their roles should be in working with each other to benefit middle level students? Participants' perspectives were elicited in role-alike focus groups during which they were asked to discuss the quality of their relationships, their perceptions of roles and responsibilities in the relationships, and factors that hinder and foster partnerships. The use of focus groups proved to be a powerful tool to answer the research questions. This research approach allowed participants to consider and respond to ideas they may not have generated individually, but with which they could agree or disagree.

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, I highlight and discuss the participants' views of their roles in the relationships and factors that influence the participants' perceptions. Second, I explore three possible implications of the study: connection to theoretical models from the literature review, speculations on the influence of contexts, and a vision of one effective partnership. Third, recommendations based on the findings are given. Fourth, a model for the reconceptualization of relationships is presented.

Highlighting Key Insights

Participants' Views of Roles in the Relationships

The findings provide insights into how family members, community members, and teachers view their roles in working with each other. How the participants view their roles and responsibilities working with children appears to shape how they see their roles in working with other adults.

Not surprisingly, the family members participating in the focus group sessions are primarily concerned with their own child. They believe that their role is to support their children by communicating with teachers and community leaders of groups in which their children participate. Some family members also believe their role is to be actively involved at school and in community groups, but most indicate that they are not. Some family members showed considerable empathy for other family members who could not be involved with their children's activities. Overall, however, contradictions exist between what family members say they believe their role should be and how they actually act out their role.

Generally, the community members' focus is also on the child as their major concern. Community members believe their responsibility with children is to be a good role model and to provide a safe environment. Yet, with teachers, community members see their appropriate role as being focused at the program level, providing information regarding programs, but not talking about individual children with teachers. In addition, community members indicate that teachers do not have time to meet the needs of all children and that teachers need to rely on community groups outside the school to make sure that children's needs are being met. Furthermore, community members appear to believe that not all family members are meeting the needs of their children. In contexts where there are not well-developed relationships, some community members state that they provide a better role model for children than their families.

Teachers clearly believe that their major responsibility is to teach children the curriculum, and the teachers' focus is on test scores, not community programs. However, teachers see that they have a responsibility to establish communication with family members and to maintain a welcoming atmosphere for community members. While emphasizing academic achievement, teachers also indicate they feel a responsibility to educate the "whole child," and they participate in numerous programs and activities that involve families and community members such as plays at school and service learning activities in the community. In the teacher focus group discussions, I received the impression that the teachers felt overwhelmed by what they see as expectations placed on them by family members, the school district, the state, and society. Those expectations, while designed to help children, are seen by the teachers as interfering with what they think of as their primary role--to "teach" children.

Factors that Influence Participants' Perceptions

In the discussion of the findings, three areas were identified that shape the participants' perceptions of their roles in working together: The degree of the development of the relationship itself and two problematic areas which need to be negotiated to improve the relationship--the lack of communication and value conflicts. I use the case of relations between community members and teachers to explore this dynamic followed by a discussion of areas of negotiation--communication and value conflicts.

Relations between community members and teachers. I chose this case because it represents a particularly undeveloped relationship that holds great promise for improving partnerships. It is evident from the teachers' discussions that when they think of "community members," they picture two distinct groups. The relationships between the teachers and these two groups are characterized by differing frequencies of interactions. One group is comprised of community members who work with children under the guidance of the school such as service learning partners and guest speakers. Teachers have interactions with community members in this group and see them as supplementing and supporting the school curriculum.

From the teachers' standpoint, the second group is community members who work with children outside of the sphere of the school (Boy Scouts, 4-H, church groups, and coaches in community-based sports programs). When asked specifically about community members involved with Boy Scouts, church groups, 4-H, and so on, the teachers indicated that they knew there were groups in the community; however, they did not know what they were and did not know how to refer families to them. In relationships between teachers and community group leaders where there are limited interactions, issues dealing with communication and value conflicts appear to be especially problematic.

Both community members and teachers agree that teachers have a limited amount of time, making the development of relationships with community group leaders difficult. In addition, both teachers and community members indicate that individuals from each group do not have to be actively involved with each other, but that improved coordination at the program level would improve communications between the groups.

The teachers clearly believe that the school district bares the responsibility to develop relationships with community groups, not the individual teachers. If the district were to take up this responsibility, many of the conflicts in teacher-community member relationships could be dealt with at the program and administrative level. However, if dealt with at the administrative level (of both the school and the community programs), I believe it is important that there be effective communication with the parties directly involved with children--teachers, family members, and community group leaders that work with children--to effectively deal with some of the conflicts.

Areas of negotiation--Communication and value conflicts. In this section I discuss communication and value conflicts as areas of negotiation across the three participant groups. The lack of communication and value conflicts appear to be especially problematic between coaches and family members, and between the community member involved with service learning and family members. On the one hand, both the coach and the service learning coordinator think that family members see them as a "baby-sitting service" and, as such, infer that family members do not value the activity for the benefit it gives children. On the other hand, family members indicate that value conflicts between coaches and family members can make communication difficult and strain relationships. The inability of the parties to negotiate problems arising from the lack of communication and value conflicts can end the relationship. If the intensity in the relationship becomes too great, family members do not allow their children to participate in the activity.

I did not sense the same tensions in the discussions of the relationships between family members and community members in instances where primary relationships are in place. In relationships where frequent interactions and shared values are the norm (i.e., between church groups and family members), community members do not see communication and value conflicts as problematic. In family member/community member relationships that are more distant, such as between some family members and coaches, lack of communication and value conflicts are seen as causing tensions and stress. Again the family member would appear to have power in the relationship. If the difference cannot be negotiated, the family member can remove the child from the activity.

Issues dealing with the lack of communication between some teachers and family members raised the perspective that some teachers also see family members acting from a position of power. This supports the finding of Lightfoot (1978) that teachers often feel they have to protect themselves from family members.

As Epstein (1993) pointed out, relationships based on power, which often lead to conflicts, need to be reformed to develop relationships based on equality and caring. To do this, interactions between the participant groups must take place so that relationships that facilitate communication can develop.

All three participant groups desire increased communication with the other groups. Increased interactions and development of relationships in informal settings are seen by teachers and family members as a way to improve communication. The types of informal interactions mentioned are activities that include the children, such as school plays. Yet, there appears to be a contradiction between the perception of the lack of time by family members and teachers, and the desire for more frequent informal interactions. It may be that teachers and family members are willing to spend time attending activities if these activities are directly related to supporting and celebrating children's accomplishments in a positive, informal setting.

Finally, all three participant groups further believe the values transmitted to children by society in general negatively influence children's healthy development. One way to combat the influence of negative factors such as those from the so called larger community, from value conflicts, and from power struggles between individuals and groups in the local community, is for family members, community members, and teachers to work on developing a sense of a common purpose and supportive action for each other. Through the development of a sense of community, facilitated by all participant groups communicating with each other to understand the issues and perceptions of the other groups, a common ground can be developed to foster the development of partnerships to support the academic achievement and healthy development of middle level children.

Exploring Possible Implications

Here, I explore three possible implications of this study: (a) connections to theoretical models from the literature review, (b) speculations on the influences of contexts, and (c) a vision of one "best case" partnership.

Theoretical Models of the Relationships

The theoretical models discussed in Chapter II that describe the relationships between schools and families can be applied and/or modified to describe the participants in this study. In the case of the relationship between teachers and community members, the context of that relationship appears to influence the theoretical model to which the teachers and community members knowingly, or unknowingly, subscribe.

The relationship between teachers and the community member specifically participating in service learning projects appears to be best described by the school-to-home transmission model (Swap, 1993), or what I might call a school-to-community transmission model in this case. Service learning partners are viewed by the teachers as a resource to support the agenda of the school, with the teachers determining how and when that support is to occur.

The relationships between teachers and community members involved with activities such as 4-H, church youth groups, and Scouting could best be described as the protective model presented by Swap (1993) or as the separate influences perspective described by Connors and Epstein (1995). This perspective appears to be shared by both the teachers and the community members. Both perceive that they have separate roles in influencing the healthy development and education of children. However, both would like the other to support them in their endeavors.

The influence of context does not seem to hold when applied to relationships between teachers and family members. Instead, the theoretical models subscribed to by teachers and family members vary by the individual teacher and individual family member. Traits indicative of all five theoretical models discussed in Chapter II were displayed by individual teachers and family members in the focus group sessions.

Both the school and the district administrators appear to be attempting to develop a partnership model, particularly between teachers and family members. As required by state law, family members are on the Site Council, which has a voice in planning, curriculum, and decision making processes. In addition, the school and the district are encouraging teachers to increase contacts with family members.

Speculations on the Influence of Contexts

In this section I speculate on the role of several broad contexts on the study's findings and analysis. Contexts important to this study are setting size, ethnic and socio-economic memberships of the participants, and the social and political conditions present in the context. In the following paragraphs, I pose several hypothetical changes in context and speculate on how the findings might have be influenced.

Perhaps the most obvious question to ask is whether or not the findings might be different if the study had been conducted in a different setting, say an urban school or a small rural school? I speculate that the major analytic themes such as communication and negotiation of value conflicts might have remained similar. I will use the example of a small rural community as grounds for this speculation.

C3 discussed the value of developing a sense of community and used his experience living in a small town as an example of a context that had a sense of community spirit and supportive action between members of the community. However, it may be erroneous to assume that this is a trait of the context of a "small town." Our assumptions and views of ideals can shade how we view contexts and how we believe they influence interactions. As Coontz (1992) indicates, "The actual complexity of our history--even of our own personal experience--gets buried under the weight of an idealized image" (p. 1). Evidence that the "idealized image" of interactions in small towns may be erroneous is provided by several "small towns" in rural Ocean hiring consultants to help them bring diverse members of the community together to identify key issues in the community (K. Noordhoff, personal communication, April 30, 1998). My own experience living in a small rural community that did not work together, was not supportive of other members of the community, and was unable to negotiate value conflicts among the members of the community further supports my speculation that it is not the context of rural, urban, or suburban, that necessarily shapes the development of partnerships. Rather, I propose that partnerships develop where members of the child's mesosystem are willing to examine their assumptions and beliefs to work together to support children. How the size of the community plays a role in this mesosystem is still to be determined.

How might the findings be different if the participants were from other socio-economic levels and minority cultures? Participants in this study were predominately white and middle class. The voices of members from other socio-economic levels and minority cultures were not heard. Although communication and building relationships between teachers and families appears to be an universal issue, as revealed the literature review and this study, unique obstacles presented by interactions of people from different socio-economic levels and cultures did not emerge in this inquiry.

I posit that major analytical themes such as communication might remain similar, but that different locally specific manifestations may have emerged. For example, family members with a limited education or who do not speak English, may have different views of obstacles to relationships than heard from the participants. In addition, family members from countries that have centralized education systems where family members have no voice may see the responsibilities of family members and teachers differently than the participants.

How might the findings be different in a context where limited resources, and state testing are not considerations? I believe the teachers' focus might have been different. They may not see achieving high test scores as their major priority nor view a lack of resources and overlarge class sizes as preventing them from more extensive reaching out to family members and community members. Instead, they might have focused on developing more extensive service learning opportunities for children and building relationships with community members.

One Vision of a Partnership

The purpose of family members, community members, and teachers joining together in partnerships is to benefit children. If there was communication and support among all three groups, children could be better served. In this section, I offer a picture of how one effective partnership would look in a "real world" setting.

In such a context I would anticipate that family members would know what community programs are available for their children, in part through information distributed by the school. Family members would have opportunities to learn about adolescent development and would have support in dealing with children pushing boundaries.

Community members would be aware of what was happening at school and together teachers and community members could plan and avoid conflicts in scheduling. A dialogue between teachers and coaches could help to reduce value conflicts, and perhaps help the coaches to better plan programs that are appropriate for middle level children.

Teachers would know what community programs are available and be able to provide information to family members and children. In addition, teachers would be aware of what was happening in community programs and how they complement the school curriculum. For example, service learning programs have proven to be a powerful educational tool for middle level children. Yet the service learning programs engaged in by community groups are often unrecognized by many educators. Perhaps teachers could give credit to students for participating in service learning through community programs, or incorporate community based service learning into school projects.

How might such a partnership be experienced by a middle level child? Instead of going home and watching TV the child could do an activity that is fun and provides her or him with membership in a positive, goal-oriented group. The child would see the coach at a school activity and see that the coach values school. The teacher who counts service learning for credit would show the child that extra-curricular activities have value and make school relevant for the child. The child would see his family actively involved in the school and the community and modeling citizenship.

My vision is based on the assumption that all parties make partnerships a priority. Realistically, the development of partnerships will take a lot of work. There are no easy answers or quick fixes, and partnerships will not solve all of the problems facing society or "save" all children. Yet, connecting various aspects and people in middle level children's lives holds promise as a scaffold for their successful passage through this developmental stage.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are addressed to civic leaders, community members who work directly with middle level children, educational leaders (including principals and district leaders), family members, teacher educators, and educational administration educators. Recommendations are presented in two parts: (a) specific recommendations based on the findings of the study are given, and (b) suggestions for further research are made.

Suggestions Based on the Findings and Analysis

Seven recommendations flow from the findings.

First, The City of Lake and the Lake School District, should jointly take the responsibility of providing a Community Coordinator to work with family members, teachers, and community groups to facilitate communication and provide information to the various groups about ways that all can support each other and middle-level children. The Community Coordinator could assist teachers to be aware of what is happening in the community and assist family members to be aware of what is happening at school and what community programs are available. The major goal of the Community Coordinator should be to insure that all middle-level students have an opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities, if they so wish. In addition, the Community Coordinator could mediate conflicts between teachers and community programs and act as a conduit for communication between the two groups.

My recommendation is based on the following considerations. It is clear from the findings that some type of coordination is needed to improve communication and link community and school programs together. However, determining responsibility for coordination is challenging. River Middle School is part of the City of Lake. Through its action or inaction, the City of Lake influences the availability of programs and services and also influences the interactions among schools, family members, and community members. On the surface, it would appear that the responsibility of coordinating programs should be that of the City. However, from a practical standpoint, the schools have the facilities to support programs and the organizational ability to communicate with family members, community members and children. Thus, through its action or inaction, the school also influences what types of interactions will occur among schools, families, and community members. Nevertheless, we must remember that the primary mission of the school is to educate the children. Schools cannot, and should not, be expected to meet all of the needs of the community.

Further challenging the coordination of programs is the fact that although River Middle School is located in the City of Lake, the Lake School District of which River Middle School is a part, includes another incorporated city and unincorporated areas. Although the City of Lake does not have a parks and recreation district, there is a park and recreation district with taxing authority in an adjoining school district and in other communities served by the Lake School District. These park and recreation districts provide facilities and opportunities for extracurricular activities for middle-level students in those communities. Although they provide some community activities, they do not, however provide links to the important community groups in which many middle-level children participate such as 4-H, Scouting, and church groups.

Based on the considerations mentioned above, I feel that a coordinator, who is attached to both the School District and The City of Lake would be the most effective in meeting the needs of the children, families, community members, schools and The City of Lake.

Second, a committee of family member volunteers at River Middle School, under the direction of the Site Council, should be charged with finding and implementing ways to increase family member involvement at the middle-level. This committee should include at least one member of Hispanic heritage and one member of Vietnamese heritage so that the school's minority populations have a clear voice. All family members should feel welcome and their participation truly valued in an atmosphere of caring and mutual support. I suggest family members take on this task because I believe that family members may be more inclined to respond if approached by another family member with children in the school. Family members should receive information about ways to support their children, each other, teachers, and characteristics of adolescent development. See Appendix F "Suggestions for Starting a Family Involvement Program," Appendix G for "68 Parent Involvement Ideas that Really Work," and Appendix H for "Sources of Family Involvement Materials."

Third, a series of community meetings should be held to identify issues within the community and to support the development of relationships that allow respectful disagreement to mediate value differences while striving to find a common sense of community and develop community spirit and supportive action for each other and children. Teachers, community members, family members, school administrators, and civic leaders need to actively participate in the meetings to identify and develop the social capital needed to solve common problems.

These meetings, themselves, are a way to start building relationships between the participants along with developing and locating sources of social capital within the community. Focus groups may prove to be an effective way of starting the conversation by providing a forum to bring family members, community members and teachers together. F15 and C4 both mentioned at the conclusion of the focus group sessions that the conversation that they participated in helped them to identify issues and appreciate other peoples perspectives.

The City of Lake should provide the leadership to coordinate these meetings, conduct a needs assessment, along with an assessment of current services, and support a coordinated plan for youth development based on the recommendations from the community meetings. Furthermore, the City of Lake should develop opportunities for an ongoing dialogue with and among the participants to continue to support the development of a common sense of community and the building of social capital.[6] The City of Lake should provide the leadership to coordinate these meetings, conduct a needs assessment, along with an assessment of current services, and support a coordinated plan for youth development based on the recommendations from the community meetings.

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[6] To be effective, these meetings should be structured to maximize interactions and discussions between the participants. Small groups (between six to ten members) should be created to allow the exchange of ideas and concerns. Each group needs to have a facilitator who is trained to establish a positive atmosphere for the group in which all views are valued and all group members are encouraged to actively participate.

Notes should be taken during the meeting and the major points and issues summarized toward the end of the meeting. (Notes could be taken by college or high school students as a community service.) At the conclusion of the meeting the participants should be asked what they would be willing to do to help address the issues that emerged from the discussions and/or make suggestions about how the issues can be addressed.

Fourth, opportunities for informal interactions between teachers, family members, and community members should be developed, under the leadership of the school, to provide environments to build relationships and improve communication. These informal settings could be work parties, or special activities at the school such as plays or sporting events in which the children participate. Leaders of local community groups that work with middle-level children should receive special invitations to these activities. In addition, multiple communication channels should be developed to "spread the word" to maximize family and community member attendance. See Appendix G for suggestions.

Fifth, teacher education programs and administrator education programs should prepare educators to understand the value of relationships with family members and community members, and how those relationships can contribute to children's academic achievement and healthy development. In addition, teacher and administrator education programs should better prepare educators in methods of communication and how to build relationships with family members and community members. This should include methods for mediating value conflicts between themselves and other parties.

Sixth, teacher education programs and administrator education programs should also prepare educators to understand that school is only one facet of the child's life and that community programs can be used to help support children's well-being in other facets of their life. Educators require training to become aware of how the other members of the child's mesosystem can influence children's healthy development and academic achievement. Student teaching placements and administrator practicum placements must be carefully considered to make sure the mentors understand the importance of all participants in the child's mesosystem. Teacher educators and administrator educators may have to convey to the mentors the importance of this view and their expectations that the mentors will help to support it. This may require educating the mentors.

Seventh, teacher education programs should prepare teachers to efficiently utilize volunteers' assistance so that the assistance is helpful rather than an added burden for the teacher. Teachers may believe that it is "easier to do it myself" than to organize work for a volunteer. In addition, volunteers can be unreliable and not follow through with commitments. Often, these problems are the result of lack of organization on the part of the teacher and lack of training for volunteers. See Appendix F "Suggestions for Starting a Family Involvement Program," and Appendix G "68 Parent Involvement Ideas that Really Work."

Recommendations for Further Research

As indicated in the literature review, there has been extensive research regarding family-teacher relationships primarily in elementary school settings. However, I did not find any research that presented the perspective of community members who work with middle-level children around their relationships with teachers or family members. Similarly, I did not find any research that examined teacher or family member perspectives on partnerships with community members who work with middle-level children. This study begins to shed the light on those perspectives; however, there is much more we need to know to enable family members, community members, and teachers to work together on equal footing to benefit middle-level children.

Research is needed to investigate the following areas.

First, more research is needed to examine the relationships between community members and teachers, and community members and family members. Such research might lead to suggestions for additional actions that can be taken to facilitate relationships between teachers and community members who work with middle-level children? What can community members and community groups do to increase family member and teacher involvement?

Second, more needs to be known about middle level children's participation in extracurricular activities. Much of the research on the benefits of extracurricular activities has focused on high school or college students. Are more middle level children likely to participate if the extracurricular activity is sponsored by the school than by the community? Is higher academic achievement attained by children who participate in extracurricular activities the result of participation in the activity, or are children who participate in extracurricular activities predisposed to higher achievement? What influences children to become involved in extracurricular activities? A large scale longitudinal study is needed to address these questions.

Third, additional research is needed to examine the similarities and/or differences between urban family members and suburban family members regarding factors that influence family involvement in schools and community activities. Much of the research about family involvement has centered on minorities living in inner city areas. Research is needed in suburban communities, including members of all socioeconomic class populations, involving both minority and non-minority families. What are the similarities and/or differences between inner city family members and suburban family members regarding involvement in schools? What will encourage participation in partnerships by suburban minority and non-minority families, from all socioeconomic classes?

Fourth, how do influences of the "larger community" (TV and the Internet) affect how family members, community members, and teachers perceive each other and children? Are those influences more powerful than interactions in the mesosystem? At what point do they influence the actions of the actors in the mesosystem and affect their own local efforts? Are the social problems so immense that they are beyond the reach of those involved? Does this contribute to a sense of hopelessness and discouragement by the parties in the mesosystem? What effective actions can family members, community members and teachers take to lessen what they view as harmful influences on children presented by the larger community?

Reconceptualization of Relationships

In conclusion, this study offers a reconceptualization of relationships based on my empirical analysis and earlier theoretical work by Bronfenbrenner. Using an ecological model as the basis for examining roles and relationships between and among family members, community members, and teachers (shown in Figure 1, page 33), allows a different way of looking at the problems of developing partnerships for both study and action.

An ecological framework facilitates movement away from our current way of thinking about partnerships which often disembodies family members, community members and teachers. Instead an ecological framework helps us to view family members, community members and teachers as "living, breathing humans" who fill multiple roles, from the child's perspective. "From the child's perspective," in this case, means literally through the child's eyes. Who does the child see when a teacher is referred to? Who does the child see when the church group leader is referred to? Who does the child see when family member is referred to? The child sees specific individuals who play important roles in her or his life.

Based on the findings of this study--including the importance of the development of relationships between actors in the child's mesosystem, needs for improved communication, and the negotiation of value conflicts--I call for a vision of partnerships where the education of children is viewed as a joint effort between members of the child's mesosystem, each member valuing the contributions of the others and working together with the goal of supporting children. To establish a context where this goal can be met, participants in a potential partnership need to make a paradigm shift so as to recognize the importance of the contributions of all members of the child's mesosystem to the child's healthy development.

To support this paradigm shift, opportunities for new kinds of "conversations" must be established. Creating an environment for such conversations will not be easy. The participants will have to be willing to examine their assumptions and beliefs, especially as they negotiate value conflicts. By negotiating value conflicts, I do not mean that people must change their values, but that it is necessary to find a common ground and ways to work together to support each other. Mediation may be necessary to create the environment that allows the conversation to take place. In Hebrew mediation has two meanings (Rabbi M. Tayvah, personal communication, May 14, 1998). The meaning derived from the Latin root indicates a promise, or to abide with the decision of an arbitrator.

Mediation, derived from the Hebrew root indicates a softening of a position so that a common ground can be found. Negotiating value conflicts will be more productive if visualized using the Hebrew root, finding a common ground so that they can melt and "flow" together.

The healthy development and education of children is a joint effort between family members, community members and teachers. The development of relationships between the members of the child's mesosystem is a place to start the conversation--to help all members of the mesosystem "flow" together and develop an awareness that partnerships entail each group recognizing each other's contribution to the child's healthy development. Through the development of partnerships based on equality and caring, all parties in the child's mesosystem can better contribute to the child's academic success and healthy development.

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APPENDIX A

MODERATOR'S FOCUS GROUP GUIDE FOR FAMILY MEMBER FOCUS GROUPS, MIDDLE LEVEL TEACHERS FOCUS GROUPS, AND COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

Moderator's Focus Group Guide
(Family Member Focus Group)

Good evening. Thank you for coming. My name is Maureen Musser and I will be the moderator this evening. Our conversation is being recorded and also video taped.

This evening I would like you to share your views on family, teacher, and community relations. Recently articles in the newspapers, public service announcements on TV, parent groups, and teacher organizations have pointed out that families, community members and teachers all need to work together to improve the achievement of children.

However, when children reach middle school, family involvement with school and communication between families and teachers decreases. There are many reasons for this. The move from elementary school to the middle school can be difficult for families and children. In middle school children may have several teachers, and teachers may have several classes of children. This makes it hard for both families and teachers to communicate and build relationships. Middle school children often want more independence from their families and may not want their family involved with their education or the community activities that they take part in.

Everyone here this evening has children in middle school. I am going to ask you some questions about working with middle school teachers and community volunteers who work with middle level children. There are no right or wrong answers; all points of view are important. I would like you to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Both negative and positive comments will be helpful.

(Introductory Question)

A. To get started tell me your name, how many children you have and how many children attend middle school.

B. When your middle level child was in elementary school, were you involved with the school? Room parent, chaperon, etc.

C. Are you involved in the same ways with the middle school?
Why, or Why not?

(I. Relationships with the other groups)

A. Generally speaking, how do you view your relationship with your children's middle school teachers?

1. What makes you feel that way?
2. Please give me some examples of how you work or interact with the teachers?
3. How do the teachers work with you?

B. We've talked about how your relationship is now. Let me ask you, if you could change it, what would you like the relationship to be like?

1. Well, tell me some specific things you would like to see changed in the relationships.

2. How would that help, or make things better?

(II. Responsibilities in the relationship)

A. From your perspective, what do you think your responsibilities are, if any, in working with your child's teachers?

1. What things should you do to help the teachers--what is your "job" in the relationship?

2. Give specific examples.

3. Why do you feel it is your responsibility to do those things?

B. What are the responsibilities of the teachers in working with you?

1. Why do you feel it is their responsibility to do those things?

(III. Obstacles to the development of partnerships)

A. What are some things that make it difficult to work with the teachers?

1. Why is this a problem?

(IV. Facilitating Partnerships)

A. We have discussed things that make it difficult to work with teachers, now let's talk about things that would make it easier.

1. What would make it easier for you to work with teachers?

2. What could you do to make it easier for the other teachers to work with you?

3. What information and support could the teachers give you to make it easier to work with them?

We have discussed your relationship with teachers, now let's talk about your relationship with community volunteers who work with your child. By community volunteer, I mean anyone who works in a community program with your middle school child. This would include 4-H leaders, Scout Leaders, Coaches, Church Youth Group Leaders, etc.

(I. Relationships with the other groups)

A. Generally speaking, in your role as a family member, how do you view your relationship with the community volunteers that work with your middle school children?

1. What makes you feel that way?

2. Please give me some examples of how you work or interact with community volunteers?

3. How does the community volunteer work with you?

B. We've talked about how your relationship is now. Let me ask you, if you could change it, what would you like the relationship to be like?

1. Well, tell me some specific things you would like to see changed in the relationships.

2. How would that help, or make things better?

(II. Responsibilities in the relationship)

A. From your perspective, what do you think your responsibilities are in working with the community volunteer?

1. What things do you do to help the community volunteer--what is your "job" in the relationship?

2. Give specific examples.

3. Why do you feel it is your responsibility to do those things?

B. What are the responsibilities of the community volunteer in working with you?

1. Why do you feel it is their responsibility to do those things?

(III. Obstacles to the development of partnerships)

A. What are some things that make it difficult to work with community volunteers?

1. Why is this a problem?

(IV. Facilitating Partnerships)

A. We have discussed things that make it difficult to work with community volunteers, now let's talk about things that would make it easier.

   1. What would make it easier for you to work with community volunteers?

   2. What could you do to make it easier for the community volunteer to work with you?

   3. What information and support could the community volunteer give you to make it easier to work with them?

(V. Perceptions of Value of Partnerships)

A. Tell me whether you agree or disagree with this statement: Families with middle level children, community volunteers and middle level teachers, should work closely together to support middle level students.

   1. What do you see as advantages of working closely together?

   2. What might be some disadvantages?

   3. And why do you feel that way?

Is there anything else you would like to mention or say more about?

Participant Verification

A. Let's summarize the key points of our discussion. (The assistant moderator will give a short summary of the key points)

B. Does this summary sound complete? Do you have anything you would like to change or add?

C. The goal is to find out how family members, teachers, and community members can work together to benefit middle level students. Have we missed anything?

D. What advice do you have for us?

Thank you for participating in this discussion. You have been very helpful.

Moderator's Focus Group Guide
(Middle Level Teachers)

Good evening. Thank you for coming. My name is Maureen Musser and I will be the moderator this evening. Our conversation is being recorded and also video taped.

This evening I would like you to share your views on family, teacher, and community relations. Recently articles in the newspapers, public service announcements on TV, parent groups, and teacher organizations have pointed out that families, community members and teachers all need to work together to improve the achievement of children.

However, when children reach middle school, family involvement with school and communication between families and teachers decreases. There are many reasons for this. The move from elementary school to the middle school can be difficult for families and children. In middle school children may have several teachers, and teachers may have several classes of children. This makes it hard for both families and teachers to communicate and build relationships. Middle school children often want more independence from their families and may not want their family involved with their education or the community activities that they take part in.

Everyone here this evening is a middle school teacher. I am going to ask you some questions about working with the families of middle school children and community volunteers who work with middle school children. There are no right or wrong answers; all points of view are important. I would like you to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Please feel free to respond to what others say. Both negative and positive comments will be helpful.

Are there any questions?

(Introductory Question)

A. To get started, tell me your name and what subjects and grades you teach.

(I. Relationships with the other groups)

A. Generally speaking, in your role as a middle school teacher, how do you view your relationship with the families of your students?

  1. What makes you feel that way?

  2. Please give me some examples of how you work or interact with families?

  3. How do the families work with you?

  4. Are there any ways that this does not meet with your experience?

B. We've talked about how your relationship is now. Let me ask you, if you could change it, what would you like the relationship to be like?

1. Well, tell me some specific things you would like to see changed in the relationships.

2. How would that help, or make things better?

(II. Responsibilities in the relationship)

A. From your perspective, what do you think your responsibilities are, if any, in working with your students' families?

1. What things do you do to help families--what is your "job" in the relationship?

2. Give specific examples.

3. Why do you feel it is your responsibility to do those things?

B. What are the responsibilities of the families in working with you?

1. Why do you feel it is their responsibility to do those things?

(III. Obstacles to the development of partnerships)

A. What are some things that make it difficult to work with the families?

1. Why is this a problem?

2. Well, what would have made that easier?

(IV. Facilitating Partnerships)

A. We have discussed things that make it difficult to work with families, now let's talk about things that would make it easier.

1. What would make it easier for you to work with families?

2. What could you do to make it easier for the families to work with you?

3. What information and support could the families give you to make it easier to work with them?

We have discussed your relationship with families, now let's talk about your relationship with community volunteers who work with your students. By community volunteer, I mean anyone who works in a community program with your middle school students. This would include 4-H leaders, Scout leaders, Community Center Youth Program volunteers, Coaches, Church Youth Group Leaders, etc.

(I. Relationships with the other groups)

A. Generally speaking, in your role as a teacher, how do you view your relationship with the community volunteers that work with your middle school students?

   1. Why do you feel that way?

   2. Specifically, how do you work or interact with the community volunteer?

   3. How does the community volunteer work with you?

B. We've talked about how you relationship is now. Let me ask you, if you could change it, what would you like the relationship to be like?

   1. Well, tell me some specific things you would like to see changed in the relationships.

   2. How would that help, or make things better?

(II. Responsibilities in the relationship)

A. From your perspective, what do you think your responsibilities are, if any, in working with the community volunteer?

   1. What things should you do to help the community volunteer? What is your "job" in the relationship?

   2. Give specific examples.

   3. Why do you feel it is your responsibility to do those things?

B. What are the responsibilities of the community volunteer in working with you?

   1. Why do you feel it is their responsibility to do those things?

(III. Obstacles to the development of partnerships)

A. What are some things that make it difficult to work with community volunteers?

   1. Why is this a problem?

IV. Facilitating Partnerships

A. We have discussed things that make it difficult to work with community volunteers, now let's talk about things that would make it easier.

1. What would make it easier for you to work with community volunteers?

2. What could you do to make it easier for the community volunteer to work with you?

3. What information and support could the community volunteer give you to make it easier to work with them?

(V. Perceptions of Value of Partnerships)

A. Tell me whether you agree or disagree with this statement: Families with middle level children, community volunteers, and middle level teachers should work closely together to support middle level students.

1. What do you see as advantages of working closely together?

2. What might be some disadvantages?

3. And why do you feel that way?

Is there anything else you would like to mention or say more about?

Participant Verification

A. Let's summarize the key points of our discussion. (The assistant moderator will give a short summary of the key points.)

B. Does this summary sound complete? Do you have anything you would like to change or add?

C. The goal is to find out how family members, teachers, and community members can work together to benefit middle level students. Have we missed anything?

D. What advice do you have for us?

Thank you for participating in this discussion. You have been very helpful.

Moderator's Focus Group Guide
(Community Volunteer Focus Group)

Good evening. Thank you for coming.

Recently articles in the newspapers, public service announcements on TV, parent groups, and teacher organizations have pointed out that families, community members and teachers all need to work together to improve the achievement of children. However, when children reach middle school, family involvement with school and communication between families and teachers decreases. There are many reasons for this. The move from elementary school to the middle school can be difficult for families and children. In middle school children may have several teachers, and teachers may have several classes of children. This makes it hard for both families and teachers to communicate and build relationships. Middle school children often want more independence from their families and may not want their family involved with their education or the community activities that they take part in.

Everyone here this evening is involved with middle level students as a community volunteer working with middle school children. I am going to ask you some questions about working with middle school teachers and the families of middle school children. There are no right or wrong answers; all points of view are important. I would like you to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Both negative and positive comments will be helpful.

(Introductory Question)

A. To get started tell me your name and how you are involved with middle school children.

(I. Relationships with the other groups)

A. Generally speaking, in your role as a volunteer working with middle level children, how do you view your relationship with middle school teachers?

  1. What makes you feel that way?

  2. Please give me some examples of how you work or interact with the teachers?

  3. How do the teachers work with you?

B. We've talked about how your relationship is now. Let me ask you, if you could change it, what would you like the relationship to be like?

  1. Well, tell me some specific things you would like to see changed in the relationships.

  2. How would that help, or make things better?

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(II. Responsibilities in the relationship)

A. From your perspective, what do you think your responsibilities are, if any, in working with the children's teachers?

   1. What things should you do to help the teachers--what is your "job" in the relationship?

   2. Give specific examples.

   3. Why do you feel it is your responsibility to do those things?

B. What are the responsibilities of the teachers in working with you?

   1. Why do you feel it is their responsibility to do those things?

(III. Obstacles to the development of partnerships)

A. What are some things that make it difficult to work with the teachers?

   1. Why is this a problem?

(IV. Facilitating Partnerships)

A. We have discussed things that make it difficult to work with teachers, now let's talk about things that would make it easier.

   1. What would make it easier for you to work with teachers?

   2. What could you do to make it easier for the other teachers to work with you?

   3. What information and support could the teachers give you to make it easier to work with them?

We have discussed your relationship with teachers, now let's talk about your relationship with families of the students you work with.

(I. Relationships with the other groups)

A. Generally speaking, in your role as a volunteer, how do you view your relationship with the families of the children you work with'?

   1. What makes you feel that way?

   2. Please give me some examples of how you work or interact with families?

   3. How do the families work with you?

B. We've talked about how your relationship is now. Let me ask you, if you could change it, what would you like the relationship to be like?

1. Well, tell me some specific things you would like to see changed in the relationship.

2. How would that help or make things better?

(II. Responsibilities in the relationship)

A. From your perspective, what do you think your responsibilities are, if any, in working with families?

1. What things should you do to help the families--what is your "job" in the relationship?

2. Give specific examples.

3. Why do you feel it is your responsibility to do those things?

B. What are the responsibilities of the families in working with you?

1. Why do you feel it is their responsibility to do those things?

(III. Obstacles to the development of partnerships)

A. What are some things that make it difficult to work with the families?

1. Why is this a problem?

(IV. Facilitating Partnerships)

A. We have discussed things that make it difficult to work with families, now let's talk about things that would make it easier.

1. What would make it easier for you to work with families?

2. What could you do to make it easier for the families to work with you?

3. What information and support could the families give you to make it easier to work with them?

(V. Perceptions of Value of Partnerships)

A. Tell me whether you agree or disagree with this statement: Families with middle level children, community volunteers, and middle level teachers should work closely together to support middle level students.

   1. What do you see as advantages of working closely together?

   2. What might be some disadvantages?

   3. And why do you feel that way?

Is there anything else you would like to mention or say more about?

Participant Verification

A. Let's summarize the key points of our discussion. (The assistant moderator will give a short summary of the key points.)

B. Does this summary sound complete? Do you have anything you would like to change or add?

C. The goal is to find out how family members, teachers, and community members can work together to benefit middle level students. Have we missed anything?

D. What advice do you have for us?

Thank you for participating in this discussion. You have been very helpful.

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRES FOR FAMILY MEMBERS, MIDDLE LEVEL TEACHERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

FAMILY MEMBER
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

Please put a check in the appropriate box.

Age and Gender:

21 - 29 ☐ 30 - 39 ☐ 40 - 49 ☐ 50 - 59 ☐ 60 + ☐

Male ☐ Female ☐

Family Income Level and Education:

Less than $15,000 ☐ Between: $15,001 - 25,000 ☐ $25,001 - 45,000 ☐

$45,001-75,000 ☐ $75,001 - 100,000 ☐ More than 100,001 ☐

What was the last grade of school you completed? Less than High School Graduate ☐ High School Grad/GED ☐ Some College/Tec. School ☐ College Graduate ☐ Masters Degree ☐ Doctorate Degree ☐

Race/Ethnic Identification:

American Indian/Alaskan Native ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander ☐ White ☐

Black/African American - Non Hispanic ☐ Hispanic/Chicano/Latino ☐

Is English your native language? Yes ☐ No ☐

If No, what is your native language? ______________________________

Number and grade level of your Children:

How many children do you have? 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 or more ☐

During the 1996-97 school year how many of your children were in each of the following groups:

Pre K _____ Elementary, K-5 _____ Middle Level, 6-8 _____ Secondary, 9-12 _____

College (undergraduate or graduate) _______ Adult, over 18 not in school ______

Have any of your children dropped out of school? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what grade(s) were they in when they dropped out? ______

Have they returned to school or obtained a GED? Yes ☐ No ☐

Interactions with School:

How many of your middle school child's teachers did you meet or talk to about your child?

None ☐ 1 ☐ 2 - 3 ☐ 3 - 4 ☐ More than 4 but not all ☐ All ☐

In general, how would you describe your relations with your middle school child's teachers? Very good ☐ Good ☐ Neither Good nor Bad ☐ Bad ☐ Very Bad ☐

What community activities did your child participate in during the 1996-97 school year? (4-H, Scouting, Sports, Church, Etc.)

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Family Members

Please indicate how often the following happened during the 1996 -97 school year.

	One or more times a week 1	One or two times a month 2	One or two times a grading period 3	One or two times a year 4	Never 5
1. Received information about how to help your child with homework from your child's middle school teacher	1	2	3	4	5
2. Received information about what is taught at school	1	2	3	4	5
3. Shared information about your child with your child's middle school teachers	1	2	3	4	5
4. Received information about how middle school children grow and develop from your child's middle school teachers or the school	1	2	3	4	5
5. Received newsletters from your child's teacher(s)	1	2	3	4	5
6. Received a phone call or a note from your child's teacher reporting something **good** about your child	1	2	3	4	5
7. Volunteered in community programs with middle school children (4-H, Church, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
8. Had a voice in decision making at the middle school (Site Council, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
9. Received information from the middle school about community activities for middle school children	1	2	3	4	5
10. Received information from your child's teachers about parenting middle school children	1	2	3	4	5
11. Volunteered at the middle school	1	2	3	4	5
12. Receive information from a community program, group, or church about parenting middle school children	1	2	3	4	5
13. How often did your child participate in community sponsored activities (4-H, Scouting, Sports, Church, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5

Approximately how much time did you spend helping your child with homework?

Less than 1 hour a week ☐ 1 - 2 hours a week ☐ 3 - 4 hours a week ☐

4 - 5 hours a week ☐ 5 - 6 hours a week ☐ more than 6 hours per week ☐

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[redacted]

Middle School Teacher
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

[redacted]

Please put a check in the appropriate box on each line.

Age and Gender:

21 - 29 ☐ 30 - 39 ☐ 40 - 49 ☐ 50 - 59 ☐ 60 + ☐

Male ☐ Female ☐

Education:

What is your educational level? BS /BA ☐ BS/BA + 30 credit hours ☐

Masters ☐ Masters 50 credit hours ☐ Ed.D or Ph.D. ☐

Race/Ethnic Identification:

American Indian/Alaskan Native ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander ☐ White ☐

Black/African American - Non Hispanic ☐ Hispanic/Chicano/Latino ☐

Is English your native language? Yes ☐ No ☐

If No, what is your native language? ______________________________

Teaching experience:

What type of a teaching license do you have? Elementary ☐ Secondary ☐

What endorsement(s) do you have (Reading, Science, etc.) ______________________

How many years of teaching experience do you have at each of the following levels?

Elementary, K - 5 _______ Middle Level, 6 - 8 ________ Secondary, 9 - 12 ________

Number and grade level of your Children:

How many children do you have? None ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 or more ☐

During the 1996-97 school year how many of your children were in each of the following groups:

Pre K _____ Elementary, K-5 _____ Middle Level, 6-8 _____ Secondary, 9-12 _____

College (undergraduate or graduate) _______ Adult, over 18 not in school _____

Have any of your children dropped out of school? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what grade(s) were they in when they dropped out? _______

Have they returned to school or obtained a GED? Yes ☐ No ☐

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Interactions with Student's Families:

Approximately how many of your students' families did you talk to on a professional basis during the 1996-97 school year?

All ☐ 75%+ ☐ 50 - 74% ☐ 25-49% ☐ Less than 25% ☐

In general, how would you describe your relations with the families of your students?

Very Good	Good	Neither Good nor Bad	Bad	Very Bad
1	2	3	4	5

Please indicate how often you did the following during the 1996-97 school year:

	One or more times a week	One or two times a month	One or two times a grading period	One or two times a year	Never
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gave information to families about how they can help their children with homework	1	2	3	4	5
2. Gave information to families about what is taught at school.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Received information from families about their children.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Shared information about how middle school children grow and develop with families.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Mailed newsletters home /or sent newsletters home with the students	1	2	3	4	5
6. Communicated with families (by phone or mail) to let them know something good the student had done.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Volunteered in community programs with middle school children (4-H, Church, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
8. Had a voice in decision making at the middle school (Site Council, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
9. Received information about community activities for middle school children	1	2	3	4	5
10. Shared information about parenting with the families of your students.	1	2	3	4	5

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[redacted] **COMMUNITY MEMBER**
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE [redacted]

Please put a check in the appropriate box on each line.

Age and gender:

21 - 29 ☐ 30 - 39 ☐ 40 - 49 ☐ 50 - 59 ☐ 60 + ☐
Male ☐ Female ☐

Family Income Level and Education:

Less than $15,000 ☐ Between: $15,001 - 25,000 ☐ $25,001 - 45,000 ☐
$45,001-75,000 ☐ $75,001 - $100,000 ☐ $101,000 or more ☐
What was the last grade of school you completed? Less than High School Graduate ☐
High School Grad/GED ☐ Some College/Tec. School ☐ College Graduate ☐
Masters Degree ☐ Doctoral Degree ☐

Race/Ethnic Identification:

American Indian/Alaskan Native ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander ☐ White ☐
Black/African American - Non Hispanic ☐ Hispanic/Chicano/Latino ☐
Is English your native language? Yes ☐ No ☐

If No, what is your native language? ____________________

Number and grade level of your Children:

How many children do you have? None ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 or more ☐

During the 1996-97 school year how many of your children were in each of the following groups:

Pre K _____ Elementary, K-5 _____ Middle Level, 6-8 _____ Secondary, 9-12 _____

College (undergraduate or graduate) _______ Adult, over 18 not in school ______

Have any of your children dropped out of school? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what grade(s) were they in when they dropped out? _______
Have they returned to school or obtained a GED? Yes ☐ No ☐

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Interactions with School and Family:

About how many of the families of the children you work with have you met or talked to:

All ☐ 75% + ☐ 50 - 74% ☐ 25 -49% ☐ Less than 25% ☐ None ☐

About how many of the teachers of the children you work with have you met or talked to about the children:

All ☐ 75% + ☐ 50 - 74% ☐ 25 -49% ☐ Less than 25% ☐ None ☐

Please indicate how often you did the following regarding the middle level children you worked with during the 1996-97 school year:

	One or more times a week 1	One or two times a month 2	One or two times a grading period 3	One or two times a year 4	Never 5
1. Received information about what is taught at school from family or school	1	2	3	4	5
2. Shared information about the children you work with, with their families	1	2	3	4	5
3. Volunteerd at the middle school.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Volunteerd in community programs with middle school children (4-H, Sports,Church, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
5. Received information from school about community activities for middle school children.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Used middle school facilities (sports fields, meeting rooms, classrooms, library, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
7. Shared information about the children you work with, with their teachers	1	2	3	4	5

Please identify your role working with middle level students and the organization you are associated with. (As a 4 - H leader, church group leader, coach, etc.). Please be specific.

Your role: ______________________________

Organization: ______________________________

How long have you been working with childeren in grades 6 -8 with this organization? ______

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APPENDIX C

SAMPLE PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Date

Name and address of participant

Dear (name)

Thank you for accepting my invitation to attend the discussion at Portland State University on XXX. The meeting will begin at 7:00 p.m. and will be concluded by 9:30 p.m. A map showing where to park and the location of the meeting is enclosed.

An Informed Consent Form is also enclosed. Please sign it and return it to me in the enclosed envelope. If you have any questions regarding the form or the research project, please phone me at XXX in the evening.

Since I am talking to a limited number of people, the success and quality of our discussion is based on the cooperation of the people who attend. Because you have accepted our invitation, you attendance at the session is anticipated and will aid in making the research project a success.

The discussion you will be attending will be a forum of middle level teachers. We will be discussing family and community involvement at the middle level and would like to get your opinions on this subject.

Sincerely,

P. Maureen Musser

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I ________________________________, agree to take part in this research project on the perceptions of family members, teachers, and community members regarding partnerships to benefit middle level students.

I understand that the study involves taking part in a conversation (focus group) with between 6-12 other people and sharing my opinions regarding how family members, community members and teachers work with each other to benefit middle level students.

I understand that because of this study there will be no risks or hazards to me.

Maureen Musser has told me that the purpose of the study it to learn about the perception of family members, teachers and community members , regarding their roles in working with each other to benefit middle level students.

I may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study. But the study may help to increase knowledge that may help others in the future.

Maureen Musser has offered to answer any questions I have about the study and what I am expected to do.

She has promised that all information I give will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law, and that the names of all people in the study will remain confidential.

I understand that I do not have to take part in this study, and that I may withdraw from this study without affecting my relationship with Portland State University or any other school or agency.

I have read and understand the above information and agree to take part in this study.

Date: ____________ Signature: ________________________

If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact the Karen Noordhoff at (503) 725-4692, or Samuel Henry at (503) 715-3304, or the Chair of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Research and Sponsored Projects, 105 Neuberger Hall, Portland State University (503) 725-3417.

APPENDIX E

MATRIX OF FINDINGS

Role Ordered Matrix: Summary of Perceptions of Family Members, Community Members, and Middle Level Teachers

	Family M -> Community M	Community M -> Family M	Family M -> Teachers	Teachers -> Family M	Community M -> Teachers	Teachers -> Community M
PERCEPTIONS OF RELATIONSHIPS Relationships Now	More relaxed than with T Intense with some coaches	Boy Scouts & church group families = good 4H, families = mixed Service Learning families = good with active families, negative with families not active CM sports families = baby sitting to negative	Good	Good to very good with most family M Bad with family M who do not communicate	Community volunteers who are not coaches = no relationship Service Learning = some good Coach = many teachers don't care - however it runs a gambit; Some great T, some poor T	"Larger" community = bad Community volunteers who are not coaches = no relationship Service learning partners = good Coaches = adversarial

	Family M -> Community M	Community M -> Family M	Family M -> Teachers	Teachers -> Family M	Community M -> Teachers	Teachers -> Community M
PERCEPTIONS OF RELATIONSHIPS Change Relationships	Improve communication	More family involvement	Improve communication	Family M initiate communication with teacher	Improve connection and communication	Improve communication
RESPONSIBILITIES IN RELATIONSHIPS Their Job	Be involved	Provide safe environment Be good role model	Initiate contact with T Get to know T	Establish communication with family M	Be enthusiastic about community programs Invite teachers to participate in community programs	Maintain welcoming atmosphere
Others Job	Provide safe, healthy, positive environment Be knowledgeable about activity communicate with families	Be involved Communicate with community M Support CM Communicate with child what activities are available	Communicate with families See child as an individual	Be involved in their child's education Be proactive in communicating with teachers	Support the whole child Provide child with information about community programs	Communicate with teachers and support school program Respect school facilities

	Family M -> Community M	Community M -> Family M	Family M -> Teachers	Teachers -> Family M	Community M -> Teachers	Teachers -> Community M
OBSTACLES TO PARTNERSHIPS	Lack of time by family M Value conflicts between family M and community M	Lack of time by family M Lack of communication Value conflicts between community M and family M	Lack of time for both teacher and family M	Teacher work load Family M time Family M attitude	Teachers attitude Lack of teacher time Lack of communication Not appropriate re individual student Separation of church and state	Value conflicts between teachers and community M Lack of communication Emphasis on test scores Teacher time
FACILITATE PARTNERSHIPS	Community M stress that activities should be fun More family involvement	More family involvement	Develop relationships in informal settings Improve communication	Opportunities for informal interactions More funding Improve communication	Teachers support community programs Improve communication	Improve public relations More money for programs

APPENDIX F

SUGGESTIONS FOR STARTING A FAMILY INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

SUGGESTIONS FOR STARTING A FAMILY INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

1. Examine the school needs AND family member needs AND don't loose sight of the big picture. How can a parent involvement program help within you school? How can being involved at school help family members? Remember, if you can get one-third of the family members involved, you can begin to make significant improvement in student achievement (Wherry, 1996), that is the big picture!

2. "Investigate the climate. Do teachers want family member involvement?" If teachers do not want family members in their classroom, how can family members be involved in other areas of the school in meaningful ways.

3. Talk AND listen to representative of all of the stakeholder groups: superintendent, school board members, principals, teachers, PTA (PTO), and family members. What are their ideas, thoughts, and concerns?

4. "Assess your resources. What support exists in the community to help with the program?" Will employers release family members to volunteer at school during work hours? Can child care be provided at the school? (Perhaps child care can be provided by a volunteer at the school).

5. "Set up an advisory committee to set policies" and select goals "for your program."

6. "Establish a system for recording family member involvement hours and types of involvement."

7. "Decide on your organizational pattern. Who will coordinate the program?"

8. "Write job descriptions for all the types of family involvement being implemented."

9. "Get written school board support for the program."

10. "Check on state or local policy matters relating to school volunteers."

11. Develop recruiting strategies.

12. "Plan a system for maintaining morale. Coordinators need to keep in touch with everyone involved in the program."

13. "Plan for continuing evaluation of the program."

14. "Establish a communication system among everyone involved."

15. Spend time building relationships with family members. Make sure they know what is expected of them, and make sure you know what they expect from the program.

16. Make sure the program is well organized and that family members will have something meaningful to do when they volunteer.

17. Say "Thank You" to teachers, family volunteers, principals, the superintendent, school board members, the secretary, the custodian, and anyone else who is touched by the program. Everyone needs to know their efforts are appreciated!

Statements in quotations are suggestions presented by Dr. Joe P. Brasher, at the 41st Biennial Convocation of Kappa Delta Pi, in St. Louis, Missouri, November 1997.

APPENDIX G

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IDEAS

68 Parent Involvement Ideas That Really Work

1. Know **THE SECRET** to getting parents to attend meetings at school-make sure they know they're **genuinely** invited.
2. Establish a friendly contact with parents early in the year, **"In Time of Peace."**
3. Insist that teachers not wait until its too late to tell parents about potentially serious problems. Early contact helps.
4. Ask teachers to make at least two positive phone calls to parents each week. Add a phone line or two if needed. Parent communication is a cost-effective investment.
5. Remember the 3 "F"s for success-Food, Families, Fun.
6. Focus on the strengths of families-they know their children better than anyone else. Find ways to get that information to teachers, other school staff.
7. Learn how to deal with angry parents-separate the parent from the argument he is making. Use active listening. Don't get angry. Look for areas of agreement, "We both want your child to do well." Find a win-win solution. If you're not sure about a parent suggestion say, "I'll certainly keep that in mind." If necessary, devise a temporary solution.
8. Provide a brief parent newsletter. One sheet of paper is best.
9. Remember **"30-3-30"** in writing school newsletters. Eighty percent of people will spend just **30 seconds** reading it. Nineteen percent will spend **three minutes**. One percent will spend **30 minutes** (your mother).
10. Remember the dollar bill rule for newsletters. A dollar bill placed anywhere, at any angle, on any page should touch some element of graphic interest-headline, box, screen, bullets ☐, **bold type**, picture-or it's too dull for most people to read.
11. Develop written policies encouraging parent involvement. If it's not in policy, the message is we don't care much about it.
12. Write for parents at 4th to 6th grade level. Use a computer to check the reading level.
13. Know why parents say they are not involved: 1) Don't have time, 2) Don't know what to do, 3) Don't know it is important, 4) Don't speak English.
14. Take heart from the "one-third rule." Research says if you can get *one-third* of a school's parents involved, you can begin to make significant improvement in student achievement.
15. Be aware that teachers are more reluctant to contact parents than *vice versa*. Solution: get parents and teachers together-just as people-in comfortable social situations.
16. Stress two-way communication between schools and parents. "One-way" isn't communication.
17. Conduct school surveys to reveal family attitudes about your school.
18. Use "key communicators" to control the rumor mill. Keep those to whom others turn for school information well informed, especially the three **"B"s**-barbers, bartenders & beauty shop operators.
19. Use simple evaluation forms to get parent feedback on every meeting or event. If we ask, they will tell us what they want.
20. Try "quick notes" home-notes the day something happens. A parent helps the child with a spelling test and the child does better. Shoot an immediate note home to say, "It's working!"
21. Take parents' pictures. Tell them in advance that pictures will be taken with their child, and prepare for a crowd.

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22. Encourage teachers to assign homework that requires talking with someone at home.
23. Ask teachers what they would like to tell parents if they had the chance-and ask parents what they would like to tell teachers. Then exchange the information! Great program.
24. Put up a "Welcome" sign in every language spoken by students and parents at your school-get parents to help get the words right.
25. Have handy a ready reference list of helpful materials parents might use to help them cope with student problems. Better yet have a lending library.
26. Set up a parent center in your school stocked with resources to help (and lend to) parents.
27. Offer parenting classes-with videos and lots of handouts.
28. Know the facts about the changing structure of the family-and consider how schools can cope to best help children.
29. Consider an inservice program for staff on facts about single-parent families-it can be a real eye-opener.
30. Breakfast sessions at school draw busy parents like crazy.
31. Be very careful to monitor how your school telephone is answered. Phone impressions are lasting ones!
32. Provide "Go to the Office" slips for teachers to give students who do something good. Student takes slip to principal who compliments child, writes note to parents on the slip (or calls parents), sends it home.
33. Be aware that parents are looking for a school where their children are likely to succeed-more than a school with the highest test scores. Show parents that you care.
34. Send a school bus filled with staff around the school neighborhood to meet and welcome students. parents just before school starts.
35. Solicit parent volunteers at the Kindergarten Registration Day program. Make it easy to sign up when parents are most enthusiastic.
36. Don't make judgments about parents' lack of interest in their children's education. You'll probably be wrong. "Walk a mile in their shoes" and understand that what looks like apathy may be exhaustion.
37. Try day-long parent academies with short repeated workshops on topics such as building self-esteem, language development, motivating children, encouraging reading, discipline, talking with kids about sex, dealing with divorce, etc. Test weekdays vs. weekends.
38. Provide training and lots of school information for parent volunteers. They are powerful goodwill ambassadors.
39. Invite parents to fill out interview forms detailing child's special qualities-interests, abilities, accomplishments. Teachers can use information to write story about child to read at school program, post on bulletin board.
40. Investigate "voice mail" systems to keep parents up-to-date on homework, school activities.
41. Find ways to provide positive reinforcement to parents. Everyone responds well to recognition.
42. Involve parents in goal-setting for their children. It promotes working as a team.
43. Use research findings that one of the best ways to get parents involved is to simply **ask them**, and also tell them **what you'd like them to do**.
44. Give parents specific suggestions about how they can help their children. Many just need to know things like: "Read aloud every day." "Turn the TV off during homework time."
45. Try a short student-written newsletter for parents about what students have been learning. (You still need your own parent newsletter. You cannot fulfill your obligation to communicate by delegating the job to students.)
46. Help parents understand *why* excessive TV hurts children-TV robs them of needed play, exercise, reading practice, study time, dulls critical thinking, encourages obesity through snacking.
47. Understand the diversity of single parent families. Living with one parent can be wonderful for

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some children, destructive for others

48. Offer school sponsored sessions on single parenting.
49. Help parents understand that student *effort* is the most important key to school success, not just *ability*.
50. Encouraging (and assisting) parents to network among themselves to solve common problems builds parent support.
51. Provide some parent education classes at the workplace. Convenience works for *7-11* stores and it also works for schools.
52. Try providing "Good News Postcards" for teachers to write short positive note about students and mail them home. One thousand postcards cost less than $200 to mail.
53. Ask parents' help in developing questions for a school "audit" to see if your school is family friendly.
54. Invite parents to a program about helping children do well on homework and eliminating things that distract them. Most have never had such information.
55. Ask parents to fill out a "Contact Sheet" listing home and work addresses and phone numbers-and the best times to be contacted in either place.
56. Have children write personal notes to their parents on school papers, surveys, invitations to school programs, etc. Watch parent response rates soar!
57. Help all school staff understand the central role they play in building parent attitudes, support and involvement-secretary, custodian, food service staff, bus driver, librarian, aides, everyone
58. Try sending home "Resource Bags" filled with games, videos, reading materials and instructions on specific activities parents can do with children at home. They're very popular.
59. Having problems getting parents involved with a child who's having discipline or other problems? Try videotaping class sessions. Showing the "candid camera" tape to parents and children works wonders.
60. Make sure all staff know the top things parents report they want to know about school: 1) How they can be involved with their child's education, 2) How they can spend more time at school, 3) How to talk to teachers, other school staff, 4) How to help their child at home.
61. Try holding "non-academic" social events to draw parents to school to see students' work.
62. Try an evening Curriculum Fair to give parents a better understanding of what's being taught.
63. Try a "Family Math Night" to inform parents about the math curriculum through math games.
64. Try "refrigerator notes." Ask students to "Take this note home and put it in the refrigerator." That gets attention!
65. Know that parents are also looking to schools for help in dealing with non-academic problems (child care, raising adolescents, advice on drugs, sexual activity). Providing help can build parent support.
66. Understand one key reason for parent non-involvement: **Lack of information**. One memo won't do. Try letters & notes & signs & calls & newspaper & radio & TV. Repetition works & works & works.
67. Transition Nights (or days, or afternoons) for parents and students getting ready to go to a new school help answer questions, relieve anxieties, build involvement and support.
68. Want to get parents out for school meetings? Make children welcome by offering child care.

These ideas from a presentation by John H. Wherry, Ed.D., President, The Parent Institute, P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474. The Parent Institute publishes the ***What's Working in Parent Involvement*** newsletter for school staff (from which all ideas for this handout have been taken), the ***Parents Make the Difference!*** newsletter for schools to distribute to parents of elementary grade children, the ***Parents STILL Make the Difference!*** newsletter for parents of secondary school children, as well as booklets and videos for parents. For information about publications and services call toll-free: 1-800-756-5525. Copyright © 1996, The Parent Institute. Permission granted for reproduction of this material if this credit message is included.

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APPENDIX H

SOURCES OF FAMILY INVOLVEMENT MATERIALS

SOURCES OF FAMILY INVOLVEMENT MATERIALS

Family Involvement Partnership for Learning
600 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-8137

1-800-USA-LEARN

NAEYC
1834 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009

1-212-232-8777 or 1-800-424-2460

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
National Education Association
1201 16th Street NW, Room 810
Washington, DC 20036

National Committee for Citizens in Education
10840 Little Patuxent Parkway #301
Columbia, MD 21044-2396

1-800-638-9675

National Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA)
700 N Rush Street
Chicago, IL 60611

1-312-787-0977

The Parent Institute
PO Box 7474
Fairfax Station, VA 22039-747

1-800-756-5525

Numerous other sources of information can be found on the Internet.